



ASCENSION LUTHERAN CHURCH

Annual Congregational Report 2018

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2018 Annual Congregational Meeting Agenda

September 30, 2018

11:30 a.m.

1. Meeting commences immediately following the worship service in the Fellowship Hall.
2. Opening Prayer
3. Reports by the Pastor and congregation's ministries: Pastor and Committee Chairs (15 minutes)
4. Evaluation of staff and council through forms created by the Mutual Ministry committee (10 minutes)
5. Discussion: The Bishop's essay, "A Church Being Re-born: Stir it Up" and how it can be applied in the next three years to Ascension. (15 minutes)
6. Care for Creation Survey (5 minutes)
7. Closing Prayer

President's Report

This has been an interesting and fruitful year for Ascension. Pastor Nancy completed her doctoral work and is now Rev. Dr. Nancy Wright. Congratulations! Her doctoral dissertation on Transformational Leadership, with a focus on Watershed Discipleship, engaged us, and has resulted in a *Watershed Discipleship Manual*, that will be introduced at the Vermont interfaith Power and Light annual meeting on October 13.

Our Christian Education program has taken a big step in hiring Jessica Summers as Education Director to enrich our programs and serve the wonderfully increasing number of new families and kids. Thanks to Lydia Wisloski, Sarah Peake, Beth Dreibelbis, the Fritsches and others for their untiring efforts to get us to this point.

Our Sunday music offerings continue to inspire us, thanks to Jeri Bergdahl, Bill Valliere, Anne Gagney and all those who sing and ring.

In the unsung hero's department, we need to thank Kate Bruno for her dedication to our Meals on Wheels ministry. And, after 12 years, Suzanne Furst is turning over the lector assignments to France Hansen - thanks to both of you. The Property Committee deserves our thanks also for their ongoing work to keep our property functioning and for the completion of the upgraded heating system in the education wing. There are many others, the altar guild, the Memorials and Celebrations Committee, the Finance Committee and Council. We are very fortunate to have so many willing hands and hearts.

So, what's coming up? We know there will be an October Fest and we'll celebrate with Christmas Lutheran Church and the National Cathedral via their simulcast in December. I'm sure we'll want to donate to ELCA or Thrivent Hurricane relief and we'll have the opportunity to provide scholarships to Palestinian kids who are being denied everything because of U.S. funding cancelation to UNHRA.

Finally, we'll be updating our long-range plan, focusing on the next three years. Committees have been diligent in their focus on implementing the last one, but more needs to be done. Bishop Hazelwood is challenging us to think outside the box and we'll be studying his document, *A Church Being Re-born - Stir It Up*. I'm happy to say we are already stirring it up in many ways.

So, I am happy to report that, from my perspective, Ascension Lutheran Church is alive and well. We are all blessed to be part of this wonderful, God serving community.

Richard Butz, Council President

Pastor's Report

Worship

Worship is the center piece of our life at Ascension. My goal for worship is to create a sacred space and time for each person to draw closer to God and to find inspiration to follow Christ.

The Worship and Music committee oversees the planning for worship. We have worked together this year to juxtapose more traditional hymns with hymns that have may have meaning to our younger congregants.

Thanks to Elizabeth Wirls for creating all the bulletins.

Thanks to Bill Valliere, Contemporary Music Director; Jeri Bergdahl, Bell and Adult choir director; Ann Gnagey, organist; and Elizabeth Dillon, adult choir accompanist.

Thanks to those who gave Temple Talks: Rachel Smith of Kindermusik and Heather Niquette, of Prevent Child Abuse VT, both of whom rent from ALC, as well as Pete Antos Ketcham, of the New Community Project, Starksboro.

During Lent, I preached on listening to ourselves, one another, and God; during the summer sermons focused on Jesus' parables as stories that stretch our minds and hearts to embrace Jesus' teachings about the Kingdom of God.

I rehearse and sing with the adult and bell choirs, and joined the bell choir to play in the VT Spring Ring on Saturday, April 21, in Bennington, VT.

Thanks to these people who coordinate worship activities: Jake Hansen coordinates Greeters and Ushers and updated the ALC usher handbook (titled "Ushering 101: Recipes for Successful Ushering"). Beth Dreibelbis masterminds the coffee hour signup.

Julie Valliere and Claire Anderson oversee the altar guild set up; and Suzanne Furst solicited lectors for many years; now France Leblanc has accepted the position. Bob Furst enlists communion assistants and hangs the worship banners.

Doug Dreibelbis coordinates audio-video-IT upgrades and oversaw the repair of our wonderful Galanti organ.

I attended the Yale conference on liturgy, "Let All Creation Praise," returning with new ideas for worship and a book of litanies by liturgist Gail Ramshaw that include God's magnificent creation and scientific awareness of its vastness and meaning. I also attended the New England ELCA event on congregational hymn singing in Amherst on May 5. I learned that new hymns are composed in times of turbulence, and this time of new hymn composing is as lively as during the Reformation.

Fellowship

October 28th, we celebrated the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, with gala dinner, presided over by Martin and Katie Luther (see winter 2017 *Mouse* for photos)

The Men's group involves men in both enjoyment of breakfast and lunch, and serious conversations.

John Fritsche began a group of parents of children in Sunday school, offering Slow Conversations in the basement on Sunday mornings. He encourages gentle sharing. He uses materials that give an understanding of ways to grow in faith, based on researchers such as James Fowler, and helps these parishioners to articulate and grow in their faith.

As the rest of this report bears out, the various groups, projects, and committees—quilt group, Property Clean-Up days, Sacred Water pilgrimages, Meals on Wheels—all provide opportunities for fellowship. We might see Ascension as a honey comb with many people going about various tasks together, all for the common good.

We lost key people this year. and we mourn their passing into Eternal Life.

Welcome of Visitors

Newcomers mention that it is the welcome by folks at Ascension that help them to feel at home. This hospitality shows the graciousness of Christ in our lives and world. Thank you, Ascension members. Part of the welcome is extending the community's awareness of our trail in the woods and labyrinth, and we will foster ways of doing this more effectively in the coming months.

Rentals

We continue to attract groups that focus on families and children. Currently, Ascension rents to: Prevent Child Abuse VT – Heather Niquette (whose office is based at Ascension); St. Timothy's Anglican Church – Rev. Micah Thompson...Meet every Sunday, 3:30-7:30 p.m.; Kindermusik – Rachel Smith – Meet Friday & Saturday mornings; "Nunn's" Men's Group – Perry Nunn (contact)...Meet every other Tuesday, 6-9 p.m.; Embroidery Guild /NE Region – Diana Snyder (contact ...Meet once a month, Second Wednesday); Timbernook- Colleen Christman – Three different age groups meet once a month on separate days

Staff

I so appreciate the work of Elizabeth Wirls, Office Manager (20 hours/wk.); Kelli Tylenda, Director of Communications (5 hours/wk.); Ann Gnagey, Organist; Jeri Bergdahl, Director of Adult and Bell Choirs; Bill Valliere, Director of Contemporary Choir. They are a joy to work with!

In June Ascension employed Jessica Summer as director of Educational Ministries. Jessica works up to 10 hours each week.

Church Council

Thanks to the council for overseeing Ascension's ministries. Members are Richard Butz, President; Kelli Tylenda, Vice-President; Roger Watters, Treasurer; Doug Dreibelbis, Secretary; and members Allison Hampson, Lydia Wisloski, Vicki Lemley, and Mousa Ishaq, and me. Gene Heyerdahl is Financial Secretary.

Sunday School and Youth

Thanks so much to Lydia Wisloski for overseeing the growth of the Sunday school to its very vibrant presence currently. Jessica Summer took over the summer class sessions, KidzKamp. She also oversaw the first Sunday of classes, on September 16.

The June 2 family canoe trip saw several Ascension families canoeing in Shelburne Bay and enjoying the wildlife and one another.

Ascension's youth are in Confirmation Class, meeting every Sunday at 9 am.

Care for Creation's "Love Your Watershed"

The art show rounded out the Love Your Watershed activities for 2017. I received the Doctor of Ministry degree from Boston University School of Theology in May. Then my advisor, Dean Mary Elizabeth Moore, visited Ascension on July 29, extending her thanks and praise to the congregation for the wonderful "Love Your Watershed" project.



I am deeply grateful to Ascension for the work on watershed stewardship, focused from March to October 2017 (with photos of the concluding art show above). The watershed work continues with a creation of a “Watershed Discipleship Manual,” focused on our activities, and to be distributed through Vermont, the New England synod, and nationwide through Lutherans Restoring Creation. I concluded my Doctor of Ministry dissertation with this evaluation of our work:

Conclusion

Based on the congregational evaluations, I believe that “A Watershed Moment” empowered Ascension’s ministries and promoted deepened spiritual grounding for creation care. Several people shared important and moving experiences. For example, during the Lake Champlain Watershed Action and Cruise Tutorial, we stopped on a river for five minutes of silence. One participant, who owns a home on the lake and has much boating experience, subsequently reported to church council that she had never been in silence on the lake before and that the experience moved her spiritually. Further, the young adult who didn’t conclude confirmation class several years earlier and who rarely attends church told her grandparents that her life completely changed by talking with one of the organizers about her hopes to work for environmental care. She changed her educational plans because of the boat trip, to pursue a joint environmental-law degree. One of the educators on the boat helped her to think through her educational plans to network with people in the field, while pursuing a degree at the University of Vermont, with its sound environmental programs.

The empowerment of Ascension’s ministries through “A Watershed Moment” derived from the opportunity to explore aspects of a problem together over time, with varied activities and involvement and supported by sermons, worship, and reflection opportunities. As described, the exploration of water occurred with the test tubes that families took to sample water near their homes, as well as the worship service on the lake, learning about rain barrels, and the introductory meeting through which we discussed problems in the watershed. All committees participated, and parishioners discovered one another’s gifts. For example, parishioners gasped in delight as they emerged from the October congregational meeting into the Fellowship Hall to discover the art show exhibits.

Because some parishioners already knew quite a lot about water, I cannot evaluate the extent to which the project contributed to changed values or enhanced advocacy. I sense fertile ground for continued watershed stewardship activities. The Care for Creation Committee did commit to carrying the emphasis forward.

Two areas that can be strengthened going forward are connecting watershed awareness to scriptural teaching as well as providing more education and opportunity for advocacy. To strengthen the link between scripture and the activities, a Biblical text could have been printed at the top of every activity announcement or flier. Further, a group discussion about scriptural basis for watershed care could promote deeper connections between care for creation, scripture, and parishioners' spiritual growth. To promote advocacy, a sermon about Lutherans and advocacy could promote deepened awareness of the need to link watershed care to legislation and policy. A specific Sunday designated for letter writing after the worship service, with a focus on water, could aid in the linkage between awareness and advocacy.

Ascension's "A Watershed Moment" contributed to a broader community effort when Ascension cosponsored a "pilgrimage" on Lake Champlain in September. Ascension initiated the effort but worked with several other agencies; they based their plans on the five-week Connecticut River pilgrimage. The organizers used Ascension's "Love Your Watershed" brochure (appropriately modified) for that event.

One final note is important to make: Ascension is not in a community that suffers from water shortage or water conflicts, but it does minister in the context of a degraded watershed that needs citizen mobilization and adequate funding for clean-up. The Care for Creation Committee has planned actions in 2018 for the congregation, which include boat trips, education, and advocacy training, granting further opportunities for parishioners to live out their belief that Earth is God's creation and the watershed needs care.

Educational

I taught the Confirmation Class with Beth Dreibelbis, the first of a two-year class. One of the highlights was the overnight retreat at the Dreibelbis home.

I oversaw the adult Bible class, but Claire Anderson led the class. Claire writes, "The Sunday discussion group has chosen a number of eclectic topics, based on suggestions from Pastor and members of the group. More important is the fellowship, almost always the discussion gets really animated when we must adjourn for church. Come and join in the fun!"

Discussions have included the Great Courses video course "Biblical Literature" taught by Lutheran theologian and Biblical scholar Craig Koester; the famous monk and activist Thomas Merton's classic autobiography *The Seven Storey Mountain*"; the stirring true story by Gregory Boyle. Jesuit priest and founder of Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles—the gang capital of the world, *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion*; Emerging Church Leader Brian McLaren's wonderful book *We Make the Road by Walking*; and Biblical scholar William Brown's inspiring *Sacred Sense: Discovering the Wonder of God's Word and World*.

Pastoral

Pastoral care is extended to parishioners in need, both by me and so many other parishioners. I am truly grateful for such a giving congregation. The memorial garden gives a special place for a very special kind of service and committal; in the case of Greta Krag, immediately after the service in the sanctuary, we had a beautiful committal of ashes in the garden. But for both John and Nancy Rivolta family, the memorial garden provided a private occasion for the family to worship and offer memories of their loved ones.

Outreach

Thank you to the Social Action and Care for Creation committees for overseeing our community-based work!

With the Care for Creation committee we offered two Sacred Water events: February 24 at the headwaters of Lewis Creek, and for the second year the Sacred Waters event at Shelburne Bay on September 8. Both were cosponsored with ECHO, the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum, All Souls Interfaith gathering, the Sailing Center, VT Interfaith Power and Light, and the Episcopal Diocese. About 15 people attended the first, and 26 people attended the second; and we connected very well with the Abenaki chief Don Stevens and UVM professor Walter Poleman.

The meal packaging on May 6 was very satisfying and fun and involved many in the congregation.

At the annual VT IPL meeting in Bennington, Oct. 21, I presented a PowerPoint and led a workshop on watershed stewardship and Ascension's work, and a significant number of Ascension parishioners attended.

The joint celebration of worship with Christmas Lutheran church, and breakfast with Good Shepherd Lutheran, Jericho; December 16 was very meaningful.

Ascension is working with VT Interfaith Power and Light, who has a grant to print our watershed manual! The manual will first be distributed to interfaith congregations in Vermont and then nationally through the synod and Lutherans Restoring Creation.

I serve on the board of JUMP (with Beth Dreibelbis, one of JUMP's most active supporters) and VT Interfaith Power and Light as well as on the networking body (called the Common Circle) of ECHO's Clean Water Network.

Several Ascension parishioners and I advocated in Montpelier on VT Clean Water Day, February 22.

The quilt group continued to create beautiful quilts to be sent by Lutheran World Relief around the world. We bless them at the altar on the fifth Sunday of the month. Thank you!

I discussed with the head of the Public Works Dept. of S. Burlington our hope to have a cross-walk on Allen Road. He assured me that this is in the works, and the only question is where to most safely situate it on Allen Road.

Peter and Karen Grant regularly pick up used and useful items from parishioner's homes to donate to people in need—a work of muscular labor and love. Thank you!

Property and Grounds

Thanks to all those parishioners who mow the lawn; plant flowers; care for the trail and labyrinth and create signage for them; and who work to keep the building clean and in good repair and the grounds attractive. So much labor of expertise, sweat, love, and joy!

Stewardship and Finance

I worked with the Stewardship Committee on our October 29 Harvest festival and Stewardship Campaign. I am very pleased the council worked on a Gift, Bequest and Donation Policy, which is now on Ascension's website.

Quarterly reports on Ascension's finances are now being sent to the congregation as part of member's quarterly statements, which is very helpful. Thanks to the Finance Committee, and Roger Watters, Treasurer, for keeping us on track with our reporting and accounting.

Synod

I continue to serve as Environmental Liaison to the synod. Ascension's work on behalf of creation was lifted to the entire Synod Assembly in June when Abigail Johnson (president of the class at Lutheran Theological Seminary, Philadelphia whose academic work focuses on care for creation) mentioned her visit to Ascension to learn from our work.

The Watershed Discipleship Manual will be distributed to the synod as early as November to inspire all synod churches.

Care for Creation Committee

Members: Jeri Bergdahl, Gail Butz, Richard Butz (Council liaison), Peter Grant, Marcia Gustafson, Sam Swanson (Chair), Bill Valliere, Pastor Nancy Wright.

Care for Creation Committee Mission: *Recognizing that we have been called by God to be stewards of the earth, the Care for Creation Committee's mission is to be a guiding light in the Ascension Lutheran Church congregation focusing on environmental concerns and issues.*

Serving as a guiding light for this congregation on environmental issues involves our entire congregation. We ask each of you to help by participating in the activities we initiate and by advising us on what can do to help you live in harmony with Creation.

From September 2017 thru September 2018 the Care for Creation Committee planned and carried out a program designed to address the Committee's long-term goals. We conduct three types of activity: (1) educating our members and our community about what is required to care for Creation, (2) helping us all live out our lives so all of Creation can live well, and (3) advocating for policies and programs that address serious Creation care problems.

For 2018, the Committee decided it would sustain the major focus on water stewardship initiated last year. Building upon Pastor Nancy's Watershed Discipleship initiative, the committee continued to provide a congregation wide focus of activity during the spring, summer and fall of 2017. While promoting the clean water discipleship theme the Committee also organized several other activities that address environmental stewardship, starting with a commitment to Ascension's land and extending to the global climate change crisis.

Water Stewardship

1. October 8 – At the fall Congregation Meeting the Committee surveyed the Congregation's views on the Watershed Discipleship activities during the previous years. The survey obtained 39 responses, which reported strong support for the program. The survey revealed enthusiastic support for this examination of the important role water plays in all aspects of our lives as Christians seeking ways to live out our faith in the community. Based on the information provided by the congregation in these 39 survey responses, the Committee decided to continue to focus on clean water discipleship for another year.
2. On December 4 we hosted at Ascension the "Speak Up for Clean Water" event at which the Conservation Law Foundation and Lake Champlain Committee led a discussion of water policy in Vermont and opportunities for citizen action.
3. On January 22 the Committee participated in the Vermont Clean Water Network Progress Meeting in Montpelier and then joined the Creating a Culture of Clean campaign speak-out at the State House, which called for action by the State Legislature.

4. February 22 - Clean Water Day in Montpelier – the Committee joined with people from all over Vermont to campaign for State Legislature action to support clean water goals.
5. Saturday, Feb 24 – Committee members helped plan and then participated in the Sacred Waters family event at Common Ground in Starksboro.
6. In May the Committee produced an updated congregation Watershed Discipleship brochure.
7. In May Boston University School of Theology awarded Pastor Nancy a Doctor of Ministry in Transformational Leadership for her work on watershed discipleship, which was built upon the work nurtured in our congregation. Pastor Nancy’s studies have enriched the work of the Committee and provided extremely valuable resource materials for the activities the Committee has planned for our congregation.
8. On June 2 the Committee hosted a canoe trip up the LaPlatte River from Shelburne Bay for members of the Congregation.
9. Drawing on the experience of our congregation during the last two years, members of our Committee produced a Watershed Discipleship Tool Kit that Vermont Interfaith Power and Light is offering to congregations of all faiths across Vermont.
10. On July 29 Ascension hosted a briefing for nearby congregations that introduced participants to the recently completed Watershed Discipleship Tool Kit.
11. On Sept 8 the Committee helped carry out a Lake Pilgrimage event in Shelburne Bay available to members of our congregation as well as members of other nearby faith communities.
12. On Sept 9 the Committee participated in our congregation’s Worship Service on the Lake.
13. On October 13 we will contribute to the VT IPL Annual Conference by leading a workshop on Watershed Discipleship. The conference will be held this year at the nearby Faith United Methodist Church on Dorset St. in South Burlington.

Ascension Land Stewardship

1. We maintained Meditation Path, completed last year, and invited people in the surrounding community to enjoy it.
2. On May 29 the Committee spent an evening cleaning up and refreshing out rain garden. We invite the congregation to build a rain garden at home.
3. We investigated a possible new sustainable approach to planning the landscape design for the south side of the Church building. Action has been deferred until plans for this area of the property are settled.
4. In August we voiced support for inviting the Timbernook Program to use our church property for a kids’ day program designed to encourage outdoor play and environmental education.
5. We regularly collaborate with the Property Committee on steps needed to manage our woodland property for the benefit of the congregation and the creatures that dwell in it.

Climate Action

1. Beginning in 2005 the Committee has initiated and supported energy savings actions that are now producing continuing money saving, environment protecting benefits. We started this to demonstrate that it is possible to do our part to address the global warming crisis. We have undertaken what has become a comprehensive effort to use energy efficiently at Ascension. We have reduced electricity use by 80 percent and natural gas use by almost 40 percent. We estimate that by the end of 2017 these

energy savings reduced Ascension's annual electric and gas bill by about \$8,500, producing utility bill savings each year that now total \$70 thousand. Although electricity use has continued to decline, the decline natural gas use has leveled, not changing much at all in the last four years. In the year ahead, we will be looking for new ways to reduce our church heating bills. The very good news is that the carbon emissions associated with our church building's energy use in 2017 were only 43 percent of the carbon dioxide emissions in 2005. Our long-term goal is to eventually eliminate carbon dioxide emissions from church functions entirely.

2. On Feb 20 we convened a community "Speak Up for the Climate" meeting to discuss public policies and programs that will enable Vermont to address the climate crisis effectively. Guest speakers from VPIRG and Energy Efficient Vermont led a lively discussion.
3. Joining congregations nationwide for Faith Climate Action Week, on April 22 we supported the message offered by Pastor Nancy in a worship service homily. We provided a coffee hour program that included:
 - a. Enlisting congregation members in "Dear Tomorrow" photo pledges for individual action.
 - b. Recruiting members to adopt pollinator friendly gardening practices at home.
 - c. Enlisting members to sign up for home energy visits provided by Efficiency Vermont that provide guidance on improving home energy use.
 - d. Enlisting members to send postcards to our US Senators to support national action to address climate change.
 - e. Calling on state legislators to pass legislation that enable climate action leadership by VT.
4. Climate change action:
 - a. Repaired a window in the Sunday School area that once housed an air conditioner – replaced double glazed casement window
 - b. Recommended that Ascension order from Green Mountain Power an energy saving replacement of the 400-watt parking lot light with two 12-watt LED street lamps to be mounted on the two poles that border the church parking lot. This will produce a monthly bill savings of about \$25 at no additional cost to Ascension.
 - c. Committed to study the cost and feasibility of locating an electric vehicle charging station in the Ascension parking lot for the benefit of the congregation and the surrounding community.

JOIN THE COMMITTEE

We invite you to join the Committee. Contact any of the Committee members listed above or just show up at one of our monthly meetings if you would like to join the fun we have together getting things done.

Submitted by the Energy Committee on September 19, 2018.

Educational Ministry Committee

Committee Members: Lydia Wisloski, Sarah Peake, Beth Dreibelbis

Primary Goal: Our goal is to meet the Christian Educational needs of the children, youth, and adults in our Congregation.

Goal 1: Enrich Christian Education with meaningful and learning experiences for all ages.

Goal 2: Foster intergenerational opportunities for learning, fellowship and service.

Goal 3: Hire a part-time Christian Education Director.

Educational Ministry continues to grow and make measurable progress thanks to the hard work of the committee and the support of the congregation. We continue striving to meet all our three-year goals and have reached our goals already. We are currently creating the next three-year plan.

The Christian education program is led by our new Director, Jessica Summers, in concert with the Educational Ministry Committee. The success depends heavily on active participation of many members of the congregation with teaching, helping classes and event, and support of the program.

We again offered a Summer 6 Kidz Kamp sessions in June and July. These are held during the church service time and are an activity - based lesson.

With more than 33 children attending Sunday School classes including 7 in the Confirmation class, we are filling every possible space on Sunday mornings. We also have an active adult class led by an adult church member.

Our classes are grouped by age/grade: Nursery (Infant -3), PreK – K, Grades 1-3, Grades 4-6, Confirmation (ages 11-14 and Adults.

The materials and teacher training are available with the SPARK Lutheran teaching packets being used by our teachers. Jessica will be holding regular teacher meetings/trainings so that teachers feel supported in this very important task. Our teachers all have a “team” with at least two teachers per group and regular helpers and substitute teachers. We are always looking for new help.

Special Sundays, such as Love Sunday, Advent wreath making, etc. are whole group activity-based lessons focusing on a special event or lesson. There are about 6 of these during the school year.

Confirmation class is in year two now and will be focusing on Colaborate, a text for Confirmation students. This focuses on Martin Luther, Church history, Catechism, and how all of this directs our lives. Confirmands, again this year, will be working as ushers, communion helpers, readers, etc. as part of their Confirmation requirements. Confirmands plan to be confirmed Reformation Sunday 2019.

The Adult class is adult led and topics are chosen by the group in concert with Pastor Nancy.

A young adult/young family group met regularly and was led by John Fritsche.

We continue to do the Nursery Roll for children birth to three years which offers Christian parenting materials regularly.

Memorials and Celebrations Committee

The Memorials and Celebrations Committee account had reached \$8,000.00 when the search for a salaried Director of Education was underway. The committee offered to augment the salary of the director and as the resources of the fund are intended to be used for the greater good of Ascension, this was an opportunity to use funds in the amount of \$4,900.00 toward the cause.

Memorial Garden

A beautiful cross is being crafted from a red cedar tree growing on the lakeshore that came down in a storm last winter. Lydia Wisloski offered the wood to Ascension for the cross in our Memorial Garden. Three of our talented woodworkers, Richard Butz, Gary Pittman, and Ron Ulmer, are working on this much-anticipated addition to our Memorial Garden.

The ashes of one of Ascension's charter members, John Rivolta, were interred on September 15th in the garden.

Mutual Ministry Committee

The Mutual Ministry committee met regularly during the year. It considered personnel matters and issues arising from the congregation. We worked with the Education Committee both to advertise for the Director of Religion Education and then to employ Jessica Summer as the director. We created staff evaluation forms, based on forms that the church had used in earlier years. These forms will be distributed at the congregational meeting. We used as resources *The Big Small Church Book*, by David Ray and then New England synod Bishop Jim Hazelwood's report "A Church Being Re-Born: Stir It Up."

Property Committee

Members: Bob and Suzanne Furst, Gary Pittman, Charlie Cutting, Ron Ulmer, Roger Watters, Gene and Jane A'Lee Heyerdahl.

- Heating units in the education wing have been replaced by Chastenay Plumbing and Heating at a cost of \$9,570. Included in that was an additional 8ft baseboard register installed in the room currently occupied by PCAVT.
- Addressed a roof drain leak in the northwest corner of the Sanctuary.
- New door handle on the entrance door by the office (automatic door).
- Repaired and repainted the walls in the office entry hall.
- Addressed the fallen trees in our woods.
- Installed new handles on the doors between the Sanctuary and the narthex.
- Coordinated with Care for Creation Committee in replacing the dusk to dawn lights in the parking lot with LED street lights. This will save on electricity used and monthly light fixture rental costs. (*Pending*)
- Committee work day (May 8) included:
 - Ascension driveway, sign posts and electrical conduit repair/replacement
 - Refinished the outside of the church front entry doors
 - Repaired lights on the exterior Cross
 - Weeding (Johanna White)
- Oversaw the annual workday (May 19) which included:
 - Washing windows inside and out.
 - General dusting included sills, shelves, cobwebs, etc.
 - Sweeping down basement stairs.
 - Sorting and cleaning the kitchen and the refrigerator
 - Cleaning of surfaces in the Sunday School room and nursery.
 - General yard work.

- NOTE: besides the property committee only 5 people came and two of those were wives of the committee members.
 - Additional committee workday (August 14) included:
 - Removal of pine needles from the roof
 - Flushing the gutters
 - Driveway post replacement by Allen Road
 - Weeding and replanting front entry gardens
 - Removed A/C frame and reinstalled window in the Education wing.
 - Replaced the seal/weather stripping on the Narthex front door.
 - Bill Valliere and Doug Dreibelbis are addressing repairing/replacing the speakers supplying sound from the sanctuary to the education wing/nursery.
 - A riding lawn mower was donated to the church with the hope of encouraging more folks to volunteer for the care of the lawn. With only two exceptions to date this task has fallen to the property committee. We may have to add landscaping lawn maintenance cost back into the budget for next year if volunteers are not available to help with this task.
 - The Property Committee is always open to new committee members
-

Social Action Committee

Committee Members: Alison Hampson (council liaison), Beth Dreibelbis, Bill Valliere, Gail and Richard Butz, Kris and Mousa Ishaq, Marcia Gustafson (chair)

Primary Goals

Goal 1: Work to contribute 10% of ALC annual budget to local and synod benevolence combined

Goal 2: Promote social ministry opportunities with members to increase education & participation

Goal 3: Engage more fully with Sunday School and Ripple

Secondary Goals

Goal 4: Increase communication & coordination among ALC committees associated with Social Action: Stewardship, Finance, Care for Creation, Worship & Music, Education Ministry

Goal 5: Keep in mind to explore & leverage additional partnerships with other faith communities

The Social Action Committee is pleased to report that progress has continued toward all five goals during the past year. At the February 2018 congregational meeting, members voted to fulfill Goal #1 by contributing 10% of ALC's annual budget to local and synod benevolence combined. Organizations and activities in the local benevolence budget are listed at the end of this report.

Goals 2–5 encompass the many social action and social ministry activities that the congregation undertakes throughout the year. Highlights are listed chronologically below, starting with 2017 fall/winter events and activities.

- **October 28, 2017:** Reformation Dinner with donations of \$2,345 to ELCA Disaster Response designated for Puerto Rico Hurricane Relief.
- **Nov/Dec 2017:** Food donations for the Abenaki Food Shelf during Advent, coordinated by Kathe Bruno with a focus on Sunday School students' participation.
- **Nov/Dec 2017:** Holiday Giving Tree—gift cards to local stores contributed to provide holiday gifts for families served by the Howard Center, coordinated by Cheryl Couillard.

- **December 5, 2017:** Lutherans (Ascension and Good Shepherd) hosted a student meal for the Cooperative Christian Ministry at UVM, coordinated by Marcia Gustafson.
- **December 16, 2017:** Simulcast Advent service between Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem and the National Cathedral in Washington, DC, with pre-service breakfast and Good Shepherd members as guests. Collected \$695 in donations to provide school kits for children at Christmas Lutheran. Coordinated by the Social Action Committee.
- **January 20, 2018:** Scandinavian Dinner with donations of \$1,893 to ELCA Disaster Response designated for Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Island Hurricane Relief. These donations were augmented by designated gifts to benevolence that increased the total to \$2,433.
- **March 25, 2018:** Bread for the World letter writing campaign to Vermont's congressional delegation, coordinated by Gail Butz.
- **April 8, 2018:** ONE Campaign action: thank-you notes written to Vermont's congressional delegation for their support of the foreign aid budget, coordinated by Bill Valliere.
- **April 15, 2018:** Ascension served as a co-sponsor of the Vermont Summit on Sanctuary, coordinated by Kris and Mousa Ishaq.
- **May 6, 2018:** Meal packaging of 15,000 mac & cheese meals for local food shelves with an intergenerational crew of members and guests, including some from Good Shepherd, coordinated by Richard Butz and supported by \$2,434 in designated gifts to pay for supplies.
- **May/June 2018:** Collection of signatures and presentation to congressional delegation of interfaith statement of concern about Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) disregard for law and human dignity, brought forward by Kris and Mousa Ishaq and coordinated by Richard Butz.
- **July 2018:** Donations of 75 JUMP food bags by members, coordinated by Beth Dreibelbis.

Upcoming events:

October 2018 (on a Sunday): Bread for the World letter writing, coordinated by Gail Butz.

- **Tuesday, October 16, 2018:** Lutherans (Ascension and Good Shepherd) hosting a student meal for the Cooperative Christian Ministry at UVM, coordinated by Marcia Gustafson.
- **Saturday, November 3, 2018:** Racial Justice x Climate Justice workshop for Ascension and Good Shepherd participants, coordinated by Social Action Committee (trainers from 350VT).
- **Saturday, December 15, 2018:** Bethlehem Prayer Service (simulcast: Christmas Lutheran, Bethlehem/National Cathedral, Washington, DC), coordinated by Social Action Committee.

In addition to time-limited activities, Ascension members also undertake ongoing ministries.

- **Coffee Project:** Selling Fair Trade coffee, olive oil, and other products, coordinated by Donna Pittman.
- **Meals on Wheels:** Delivering meals on eight different routes in the Burlington area on the 1st and 5th Fridays of the month, coordinated by Kathe Bruno. [This ministry ended as a congregational endeavor on June 29, 2018, after 40 years of service.]
- **Quilting:** Tying quilts on the 1st and 3rd Thursdays of the month that are sent to those in need through Lutheran World Relief, coordinated by Karen Martin.
- **Shampoo and books for JUMP:** Providing children's books and shampoo to JUMP on a year-round basis, coordinated by Beth Dreibelbis.

Organizations/Activities in 2018 Local Benevolence Budget

- ANEW (previously known as Burlington Emergency Shelter)
- Ascension Quilters

- Ascentria Good News Garage
- Chittenden Emergency Food Shelf
- Christmas Lutheran Church (Ascension's sister congregation in Bethlehem)
- Cooperative Christian Ministry at UVM
- JUMP (Joint Urban Ministry Project)
- Meal Packaging
- McClure Miller VNA Respite House (previously known as Vermont Respite House)
- Racial Justice x Climate Justice workshop
- Vermont Interfaith Action

Stewardship Committee

This is the Stewardship Committee's busy time of year, planning and executing the annual fall campaign that asks you, our Ascension brothers and sisters, to commit to each other and to the work of the church with not only financial support, but also time and talent support.

Soon the committee will ask you to consider increasing your donation to the church—possibly making that commitment through a pledge. Just as treasured will be your generous response to the Time and Talent form, your commitment to serve God's church on earth in deed and in hours.

The theme of this year's campaign will take to heart the instructions in Ephesians 5:15 and 16:
"Be careful how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time ..."

Two goals of the Stewardship Committee—to broaden the definition of stewardship to help parishioners create a church that is an unmistakable force for good in the world, and to make stewardship a year-round endeavor—get support from the work of such committees as Care for Creation and Social Action.

A third goal of the Stewardship Committee—to encourage parishioners in stewardship of the faith—will, as in past campaigns, be an important part of this year's stewardship campaign.

The Stewardship Committee report ends with the results of the 2017 campaign:

Speaking for the church, the committee is grateful ...

- to the 46 members who returned their 2017 Time and Talent forms, signing up for 420 tasks!
- to members providing this financial foundation that Financial Secretary Gene Heyerdahl shared (Jan. 12, 2018)

2018 pledging results as of Sunday, Dec. 31, 2017:

42 pledges have been received totaling \$147,440, of which 18 giving units increased their pledge over last year and 2 were new pledges. Three who pledged in 2017 have yet to make a pledge for 2018 and 2 who pledged in 2017 are no longer with us. Estimated 2018 giving for remaining regular givers totals \$26,895, giving a grand total of \$174,335. Last year's estimated grand total (for 2017) was \$159,145 and by the end of 2017 totaled \$197,912.

Erik Breiland, chair; Vicki Lemley, liaison; Joe Oppenlander and Pastor Nancy

WORSHIP AND MUSIC COMMITTEE

The primary goals of the W&M committee, as defined in the Ascension Long Range Plan 2016-2018, are:

- Find a worship mix to enable people to go out and be the people of God
- Involve youth in planning and implementing worship
- Be open to experimentation

Accomplishments in the past 12mo. toward achieving these goals included:

Routine tasks:

- Arranged for guest worship leaders for when Pastor Nancy is away from Ascension.
- Facilitated collaboration and coordination between Pastor, assorted Choirs, musicians, ushers, Liturgical assistants, and Communion assistants to provide a pleasant, efficient worship experience for the congregation.
- Created a formal mechanism for tracking service settings used throughout the year.
- Service planning

New Business:

- Facilitated organ repair. July 2018.
 - Provided some diagnostic assistance.
 - Provided more robust power strip to minimize probability of another power surge damaging organ system.
 - Coordinated activity between two authorized organ repairmen, including follow-up activities regarding organ operating system and software.
- Investigated audio-video-IT upgrades for Ascension
 - Composed a “wish list” of desired upgrades from personnel within Ascension (e.g., choirs, office, Sunday School)
 - Worked with local audio-video vendors to compose alternative proposals to satisfy the desired upgrades.
 - Presented proposal to Council for consideration in 2018.
 - Current plan is to address least expensive items ourselves (e.g., Wi-Fi throughout building), but to table the more expensive options until higher priority items are addressed.
- New hymnody: There are more hymns being written at this time than has been true before. There was a considerable amount of discussion about how we might add some of this new music to our worship.
 - **Recommendation:** It is important that we choose lengths of music, whether it be these potentially new additions, songs from the ELW or other contemporary sources, or Prelude music that complement the flow of the service and not delay or prolong it unnecessarily.
 - **Recommendation:** Generally, hymns should be chosen so that ½ of those used are up-lifting and intuitive enough so that even a person who cannot read music can learn the melody in time to participate in the 2nd verse. If there is a question about a desired piece, time should be used before the start of the service to teach the congregation the new music.

Longer term accomplishments

- Facilitate variety in our worship experience
 - Provided a variety of service leaders, including:
 - Dr. Thomas/Good Shepherd, Pr. Ann Larson, Debbie Ingram, Bill Valliere
 - Arranged for an assortment of Temple Talks

- Facilitated a variety of worship types
 - Worship at North Beach, Blessing of the Animals, Youth Sunday
- Insure that the worship experience relates to current events
 - For example, Pastor has made a point to address world events in her sermons
 - Invite guest speakers for sermons or Temple Talks that have a specific topic of interest for us to receive.

Open items still being discussed:

- **Question** (to be answered prior to Christmas 2018): Should we have a service on Christmas morning?
- **Question:** It was mentioned that the usage of the Passion from The Gospel of Mark on Palm Sunday and again on Good Friday was repetitive.
 - Could we/should we do something different on Good Friday?
- **Question:** Can we ask our youth to recommend topics of interest, from their perspective, to be addressed in a Sunday sermon?
- **Question:** Can we incorporate more contemporary stories into the sermon that would emphasize the relevance and suggest applications of that day's Lessons/Gospel to our daily lives (special request from Confirmands)?
- **Question:** Can we ask each committee to plan a service that, while using the Lessons and Gospel for that day as a foundation, focuses a lens on that group's primary area of interest?
- **Question:** Can we ask members of the congregation to visit other churches (in VT or elsewhere) to gather best-of-breed ideas that we could incorporate in our worship?
- **Question:** Can we can compose, with the organ repairman's help, a list of preventative maintenance items (e.g., changing the batteries on the mother board)?

Pastoral: Liturgical Acts

New Members

- Barry Lemley 10/22/17
- Betsy Bouton 1/7/18
- Ethne Gray 5/6/18
- Stephanie and Heather Lehtonen 7/8/18
- Sarah Flynn 7/8/18 (Associate Member)

Memorial Services /Celebrations /Committal of Ashes

- John Antos 1/19/18
- Gudny Rivers 1/27/18
- Harriet Richards 2/28/18
- Bob Bergeson 4/15/18 (in Middlebury)
- Beth Angolano Dreibelbis 7/6/18
- John Rivolta 9/15/18
- Jody Wuensch 9/16/18