

THE MESSENGER

ASCENSION LUTHERAN CHURCH

January 2022

WEEKLY EVENTS

- Sunday Worship - 10:30 AM
- Sunday School - 9:30 AM (adult & child)
- NA Meeting - Wednesdays at 7:30 PM
- Spirituality Group - Thursdays at 7 PM
- AA Meeting - Saturdays at 10:00 AM
- Soccer Shots - Saturday mornings & Tuesday evenings (Spring-Fall)



2021 Ascension Church COUNCIL

- John Bielewicz
- Jason Eager
- Chelsea Karaffa
- Clay Marnich
- Phil Spano
- Barbara Thompson
- Bob Thompson
- Mark Thompson
- Venus Thompson
- Jerry Wessel
- Jeff Williams

Mount Calvary Cemetery Board

- Bob Dudek
- Judy Henry
- Bob Hughes
- Bette Ann Kallay
- Joyce Leister
- Pastor Joe Murdy
- Jeff Williams

Next Council Meeting

Tuesday January 11 at 7:00 PM

New Year... Blessings Ahead!



From Pastor Murdy's Desk

What a year!

Oftentimes as we stand on the brink of a new year, we look back to see where we've been and look ahead with hope. We might even be tempted to rush into a new year with the challenges we faced as a society in 2020 and 2021. I recently saw

an image depicting baby new year as an old man, beaten down by the last year. Let's face it, it was rough. Challenges were faced. Obstacles were overcome. We continue to do our best in caring for one another, yet Covid lingers. If the past few years has taught me anything, it's that we mustn't give up and we must stick together as a community. 2021 may have had its rough spots, but it was rich with blessings!

Here are just a few things which immediately come to mind:

- THE MERGER!
- Our sanctuary has been transformed with the addition of a pulpit, lectern, projector and screen, new communion vessels, an organ and new piano.
- Our worship has been transformed with the addition of so many new people, adding their hands and voices to our collective worship.
- New members were received and our community continues to grow.
- In the month of December, we received two separate donations totaling thirty-thousand dollars for the ministry and well-being of our church and mission.

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THANK YOU!

Dear Church Family,

Amanda and I are overwhelmed by your generosity this year as we received our Christmas card.

We have no words that come close to showing our gratitude other than

Thank YOU!

We are truly blessed to call you our church family. This year we will be married 7 years and in May we have plans to *finally* go on our Honeymoon to Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao. Your generous gift has gone right toward that adventure!

Thank you.

We LOVE YOU!

Amanda and PJ



The Murdy Family
Amanda, Harper, McKenna,
Jameson, Zoey, PJ

From Pastor Murdy's Desk (continued from pg 1)

- We continue to look towards the future with great hope, optimism and excitement.

As I look ahead at a new year and all the opportunities we have before us, I have begun to prayerfully ask the question, "Where will you have us go? What will you have us do?" We have grown and changed so much in the past year. Now it may be time to look within ourselves and ask the question, "Now what?" Is it time to look at our mission? Where can we improve and grow? Where might God be calling us to go? I invite each of you to join me in prayerfully wondering what's next and discerning where God is calling us.

Happy New Year!

Excited to see where God takes us!

In Christ +

Pastor

“ We **mustn't**
give up, and we **must**
stick **together**
as a
Community ”

~ PJ

THANK YOU MOST KINDLY!

The Creative Hands Group of Ascension Church wishes to thank everyone who purchased crafts in November 2021. The \$230 collected from the sale of the group's beautifully unique handmade goods was donated to the InterFaith Food Bank of McKees Rocks. God's Blessings!



ALC Council Meeting Highlights

Council meeting was held Tuesday Dec. 14, 2021

- Motions to accept Darlene Witt as new member.
- Motions to remove 58 members listed in pastor's report. Please note: 58 sounds like a huge number, but it's really not. The majority of those removed were people who have moved years ago, a few have requested to transfer and several were related to the pastor.
- Motion to update sound system to not exceed \$1500.00.
- Next special project to be considered by council in January.
- Council signed retainer for Brian Lindauer to remain as cemetery's (and now Ascension's) attorney.
- August to be the last month for Sophia (church cleaner).

Next Council Meeting

Tuesday, January 11, 2022

Congregational Meeting

Sunday, January 30

Save the Date:

SUNDAY, JAN. 16, 2022 - 4PM

The Legacy of

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

**BERKELEY HILLS LUTHERAN CHURCH
517 SANGREE ROAD, PITTSBURGH, PA 15237**

The Southwest Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America will celebrate the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. with an ecumenical service of Holy Communion.

Bishop Abraham Allende, Presiding

The Rev. Lamont Wells, Preaching

The service will encourage membership of the SWPA Synod and the synod's partners to be engaged actively in the practice of nonviolence in our continuing efforts to build the Beloved Community in Pittsburgh.

As allowed by COVID protocols, the service will be in person and livestreamed. Masks are required for in-person attendance.

View the Livestream at:

SWPASYNOD.ORG/MLK2022

got NEWS?

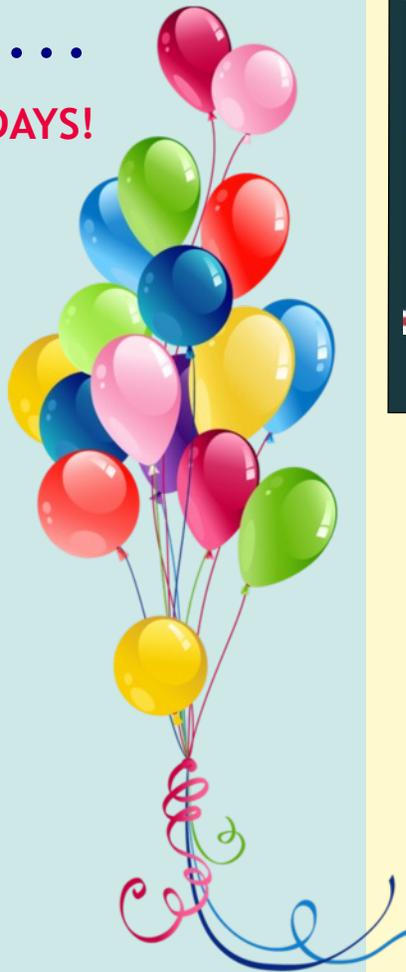
If you have pictures, articles, or ideas to submit for the **FEBRUARY 2022** Newsletter, please contact the office or Pastor, or email office@alcpgh.com.

Best Wishes . . .

JANUARY BIRTHDAYS!

Date | Member/Friend

- 4 Dolly Spano
- 5 Daniel Giza
- 9 Philip Paladino
- 12 Mark Thompson
- 13 Bette Ann Kallay
- 14 Layla McEwen
- 15 Kelly Braun
- 19 Tom Lanzarotta
- 20 Amy Lanzarotta
- 21 Alexis Brown
- 23 Darlene Witt
- 24 Glenn Simpson
Nate Zoltun
- 27 Ryan Hughes
Don Lucas
Clay Marnich
- 28 Mark Marnich
- 31 Joyce Leister



. . . and Blessings to ALL!

IMPORTANT DATES

JANUARY 2022

- Tue 11 Council Meeting**
- Sun 16 Cemetery Board Meeting**
- Tue 18 Confirmation**
- Sun 23 New Member**
- Sun 30 Congregational Meeting**

Lunch Bunch



A monthly gathering of members and friends of Ascension Church

Join the LUNCH BUNCH for a Caribbean adventure - Thursday Jan. 20

Ascension's Lunch Bunch were graciously invited to Mark and Barbara Thompson's home in December to celebrate Christmas. The lunch, snacks and desserts were all outstanding (and ample) and their home was beautifully decorated. We had fun singing Christmas carols and playing a game to identify holiday songs. This writer didn't do very well - his wife says that in a battle of wits, he's "short on ammunition." But we all had a great time and are very thankful to Mark and Barbara for their hospitality.

So then, what's next? Taking inspiration from an old Beach Boys song, "*We come on the sloop John B, my grandfather and me, around Nassau town we did roam...*" the Bunch decided that a trip to the Caribbean in January was a good idea - or at least getting as close to the Caribbean as we could, given travel restrictions and lack of passports, time, money, etc. Therefore, on **Thursday January 20, the Bunch is meeting at Bahama Breeze at 11:30 AM** to enjoy the trade winds (or maybe a hurricane) and eat some island fare, drink drinks with little umbrellas in them; or, whatever strikes your fancy. Bahama Breeze is located at the Robinson Mall in the group of restaurants that includes Olive Garden. If you want to carpool, you should meet at the church at 11 AM to bum a ride (or transport others). Please let Jerry Wessel (412-787-1213) or Nancy Schreiber (412-859-3969) know by Tuesday, Jan. 18 if you plan to attend so that they have room in the galley to seat everyone. Shorts, flip-flops, colorful shirts, sunglasses and floppy hats are not required (nor recommended for Pittsburgh in January), but if you feel safer with a mask, please do wear one - until your little umbrella drink and your lunch arrive, of course.

All are invited, so, "*Hoist up the John B's sails, see how the main sail sets . . .*" and join us!

~ Jerry Wessel

WE SAW THE STAR IN THE EAST, AND WE CAME TO WORSHIP HIM.

(Matthew 2:2)

The theme for the **Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 2022** was selected by the Middle East Council of Churches and originates from the churches in Lebanon. Present times in Lebanon are extremely difficult and economically disastrous. All this combined with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have made the situation quite stressful. The power of prayer in solidarity with those who suffer is a demonstration of Christian unity and a sign of communion.

The theme, taken from the second chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew, is the Epiphany. Each year in January, the Church recalls the visit of the Magi to Bethlehem, highlighting God's invitation to all of humanity to a new covenant in the Incarnation of Christ. In the Eastern Churches, Epiphany is joined to the mystery of the Baptism of Christ, a baptism all Christians hold in common as testimony to their faith in the Son of God.

Celebrate the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity January 18-25, 2022.

"That they all may be one."



Like the Magi who braved the perils of a long and dangerous journey to find the Christ child, our Christian brothers and sisters in the Middle East face many hardships as they strive to live out their faith in Christ. Our prayer in solidarity with their suffering is a light of hope and communion.

Will you answer the call to serve?

Our worship as a community of faith depends on the hands and voices of each and every one of us. Each Sunday we gather to praise God, be instructed by the Word, be fed and nourished at the Lord's table and sent out in mission. If you are interested in participating in the life of our worshipping community as an Assistant Minister, Lector, Usher, Acolyte, Sacristan (helps set up/clean up) or Communion Assistant please let PJ know. We are developing a new schedule/calendar and would love to see your name on it! If you have any questions regarding what a specific role entails, please don't hesitate to ask. You can also sign up to be more than one!

PJ+ pastor@alcpgh.com (412) 860-7253

SUNDAY LECTOR SCHEDULE

JAN. 9

Gib Palmgren

JAN. 16

Daniel Giza

JAN. 23

Jason Eager

JAN. 30

Jennifer Burkholder

FEB. 6

Sharon Giza

FEB. 13

Debbie Whitfield

FEB. 20

Mark Thompson

FEB. 27

Mary Thompson

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

January 18 - 25, 2022

Daily Prayers

Day 1: Raise us up and draw us to your perfect light. "We observed his star in the East." (Matthew 2:2)

Prayer for Day 1

Lord God, illumine our path by the light of Christ who moves us and leads us. Guide us to discover a small manger in our hearts where a great light still sleeps. Creator of light, we thank you for the gift of that unfading Star, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Heal our divisions and draw us closer to the Light that we may find our unity in him. Amen.

Day 2: Humble leadership breaks down walls and builds up with love. "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?" (Matthew 2:2)

Prayer for Day 2

God, our only refuge and strength, help us to seek our Lord Jesus Christ not in the palaces of the powerful but in the humble manger and to emulate him in his meekness. Encourage us to empty ourselves as we serve each other in obedience to you. We pray in the name of Christ who with you and with the Holy Spirit reigns forever in glory. Amen.

Day 3: The presence of Christ, turning the world upside down. "When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him." (Matthew 2:3)

Prayer for Day 3

O Lord, you have illumined the star of hope in our lives. Help us to be united in our commitment to bring about your Reign of love, justice and peace and so to be the light of hope to all those living in the darkness of despair and disillusionment. Shine your light upon us and set our hearts on fire so that your love surrounds us with warmth. Lift us up to you, you who have emptied yourself for our sake, so that our lives may glorify you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Day 4: Though small and suffering, we lack nothing. "And you, Bethlehem... are by no means least" (Matthew 2:6)

Prayer for Day 4

Good Shepherd, the fragmentation of the little flock grieves your Holy Spirit. Forgive our weak efforts and slowness in pursuit of your will. Give us wise shepherds after your own heart who recognize the sin of division, and who will lead the churches with righteousness and holiness, to unity in you. We ask you, Lord, to hear our prayer. Amen.

Day 5: Guided by the One Lord "Ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising." (Matthew 2:9)

Prayer for Day 5

O Lord God our Father, increase our hope in you and let us know at all times that you are walking with us, watching over your people. Open our eyes to your Spirit, and encourage us in our faith, so that we may confess that Jesus is Lord, and worship and rejoice in him as the Magi did in Bethlehem. We ask you these blessings in the name of your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

Day 6: Gathered in worship around the One Lord "They saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage." (Matthew 2:11)

Prayer for Day 6

Compassionate God, you gave the blind the insight to recognize you as their Savior, enable us to repent. In your mercy, remove the scales from our eyes and lead us to worship you as our God and Redeemer. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be upon us, so that together we glorify you in the Spirit's fellowship, and witness to all those around us. Amen.

Day 7: The gifts of communion. "Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh." (Matthew 2:11)

Prayer for Day 7

Lord God, you have revealed yourself in the epiphany of your Son both to those who have long awaited for your coming, and to those who were not expecting you. You know the suffering that surrounds us, the pain caused by our divisions. We ask you to enable our hearts and our minds to know you. As we join the wise men coming from afar, we pray that you open our hearts to your love and to the love of our brothers and sisters around us. Receive our prayer in the name of your Son Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Day 8: Beyond the familiar routes of separation to God's new paths. "They left for their own country by another road." (Matthew 2:12)

Prayer for Day 8

Gracious God, when we think that all roads are blocked, and we fall into despair, we always find you there. We find you creating a new path before us, one that we did not expect. We thank you because your creative paths open up unforeseen possibilities. Help us to always find you, who lead us yet by a more excellent way. We pray through Jesus Christ our Lord, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, that you will always lead us back to you. Amen.

*Source: Franciscan Friars of the Atonement
Graymoor Ecumenical & Interreligious Institute
https://geii.org/week_of_prayer_for_christian_unity*

LESSER FESTIVALS & commemorations

January 1 The Name of Jesus

By Jewish law, every baby boy was circumcised and named on the eighth day of life, so on the eighth day of Christmas the church celebrates this event in Jesus' life. The keeping of the covenant as well as Jesus' name are signs of God's salvation given to us through him.

January 2 Johann Konrad Wilhelm Loehe

renewer of the church, d. 1872

A nineteenth-century German Lutheran pastor, Loehe worked to enliven the church with the eucharist at its center, from which would flow evangelism and social ministry. He sent pastors to North America, Australia, New Guinea, Brazil, and Ukraine.

January 15 Martin Luther King Jr.

renewer of society, martyr, d.1968

An American prophet of justice among races and nations, King was an eloquent preacher, a leader of the nonviolent resistance to race-segregated society, and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. Born on this date, he was assassinated on April 4, 1968.

January 17 Antony of Egypt

renewer of the church, d. ca. 356

One of the earliest of the Egyptian desert fathers, Antony gave away his sizeable inheritance and became a hermit. Later he became leader of a group of monks who devoted themselves to prayer, worship, and labor.

January 17 Pachomius

renewer of the church, d. 346

Born in Egypt, Pachomius became a Christian while a soldier. He became a hermit (a solitary monk) and organized others into a religious community. His rule for monasteries influenced later ones in both the Eastern and Western churches.

January 18 Confession of Peter

• Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Begins •

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is framed by two commemorations, the Confession of Peter (a relatively recent addition to the calendar) and the older Conversion of Paul. Both apostles are remembered together on June 29, but these two days give us an opportunity to focus on key events in each of their lives. Today we remember that Peter was led by God's grace to acknowledge Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). This confession is the common confession that unites us with Peter and with all Christians of every time and place.

January 19 Henry, Bishop of Uppsala martyr, d.1156

When Erik, King of Sweden, determined to invade Finland for the purpose of converting the people there to Christianity, Henry went with him. Henry is recognized as the patron saint of Finland.

January 21 Agnes martyr, d. ca. 304

Agnes was a girl of about thirteen living in Rome. The details of her martyrdom are not clear, but she gave witness to her faith and was put to death as a result, most likely by the sword. The church has honored her as one of the chief martyrs of her time.

January 25 Conversion of Paul

• Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Ends •

The week of prayer begun by the remembrance of Peter's confession now comes to an end as we recall the pivotal moment in the life of the other pillar of the early church, the apostle Paul. His encounter with the risen Christ turned him from persecutor of the followers of Christ to one of their leaders.

January 26 Timothy, Titus and Silas missionaries

These three early Christian men were missionary companions of the apostle Paul. Timothy became bishop of Ephesus, Titus bishop of Crete, and Silas was imprisoned with Paul at Philippi until they were delivered by an earthquake.

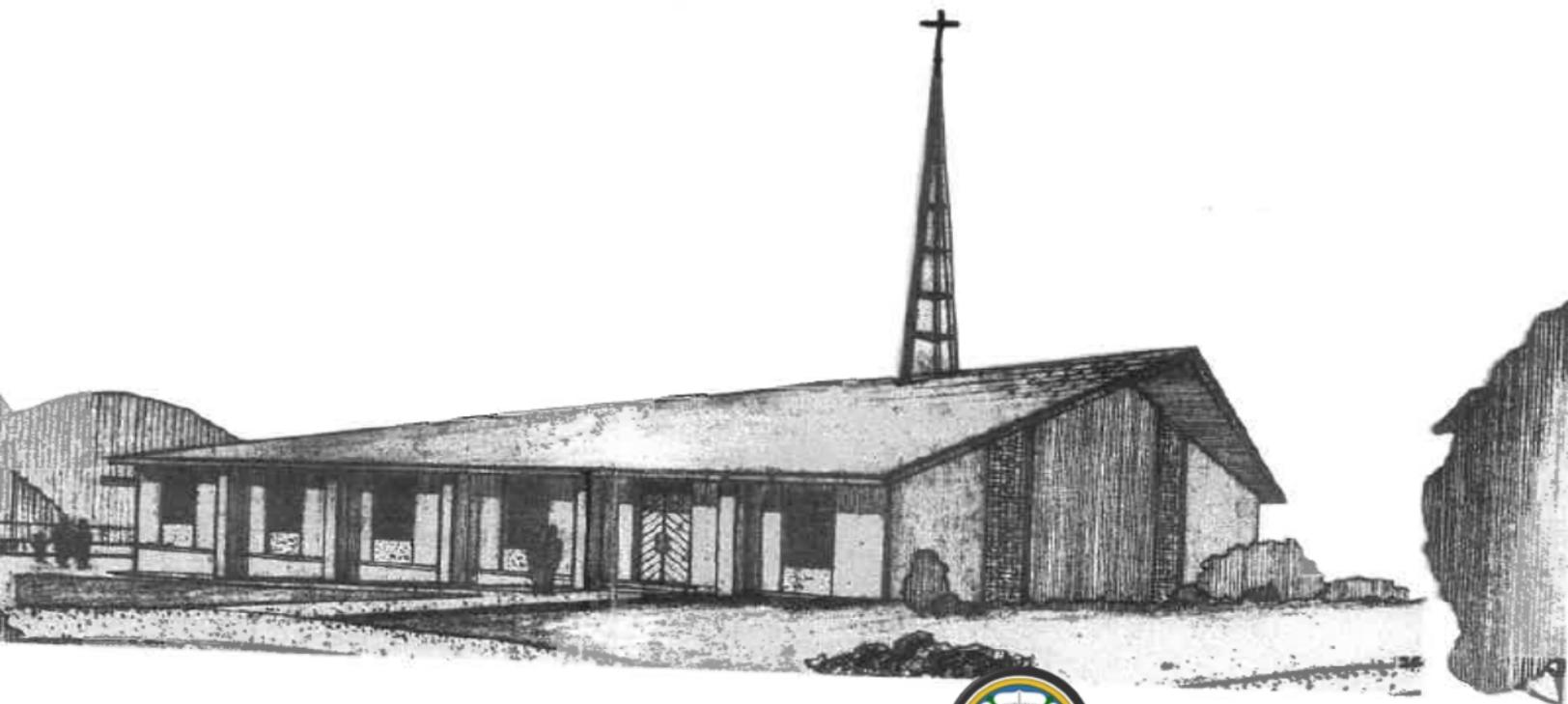
January 27 Lydia, Dorcas and Phoebe

witnesses to the faith

Women as well as men were important Christian leaders from the beginning, as demonstrated by these coworkers of the apostle Paul. Lydia, a seller of purple goods, lent her home for a church; Dorcas was known for charitable works; Phoebe was a deacon in the church at Cenchrae.

January 28 Thomas Aquinas teacher, d. 1274

Thomas Aquinas was a brilliant and creative theologian of the thirteenth century. He was first and foremost a student of the Bible and profoundly concerned with the theological formation of the church's ordained ministers. As a member of the Order of Preachers (Dominicans), he worked to correlate scripture with the philosophy of Aristotle, which was having a renaissance in Aquinas's day. Some students of Aristotle's philosophy found in it an alternative to Christianity. But Aquinas immersed himself in the thought of Aristotle and worked to explain Christian beliefs in the philosophical culture of the day.



*To be Christ's Disciples,
nurture our faith, serve God,
welcome our neighbors,
and joyfully share in His love.*

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HERE

