

THE MESSENGER

ASCENSION LUTHERAN CHURCH

February 2024

WEEKLY EVENTS

Sunday Worship - 10:30 AM
Sunday School - 9:30 AM (adult & child)
Drum Class - Mondays 5-8 PM Apr-July
NA Meeting - Wednesdays at 7:30 PM
AA Meeting - Saturdays at 10:00 AM
- Mondays at 7:00 PM
Soccer Shots - Saturday mornings &
Tuesday evenings (Spring-Fall)



2024 COUNCIL EXECUTIVES

President – Jeff Williams
Vice President – Jason Eager
Secretary – Thom Kruse
Treasurer – Bob Thompson

2024 COUNCIL LIAISONS

Christian Education
Pastor Joe Murdy
Communications & Publications
Jason Eager
Finance & Stewardship
John Bielewicz
Mutual Ministry
Jeff Williams
Personnel
John Bielewicz, Thom Kruse
Property
Phil Spano
Fellowship, Social Ministry
& Evangelism
Sharon Giza
Worship & Music
Thom Kruse
Youth
Chelsea Karaffa

Next Council Meeting

Tuesday February 13 at 7:00 PM

What a year: a 2023 retrospective



From Pastor Murdy's Desk

My dear friends in Christ,

Grace and peace to you, dear friends, from God our Father; through the love of Christ who lives and reigns with the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever, amen!

I am grateful. Grateful for your love, generosity,

support, prayers and partnership in the gospel. The gospel is our mission, first and foremost. If I could articulate one consistent theme in my children's sermons, it would be the idea that we are all called to share God's love - to tell the story about what Jesus did for us and why. That is what we are called to do as a church. How are we doing at our job?

In the army at the end of just about everything we do we conduct an AAR (after action review). Someone, namely someone who led the activity or event will begin by asking "what was supposed to happen?" We then list all of the objectives and accomplishments that occurred. Followed by, "what went right and what went wrong?" This is always a great opportunity to think about the areas we need to grow and validate those moments of success. The AAR is completed when we consider those things which might help us improve.

The process of an AAR is helpful for leadership, especially in planning for the future. As I look back on 2023, I am overwhelmed by the way some of our members stepped in and showed up. I am grateful for our leaders and volunteers who participated in activities throughout the year. Thank you.

In 2022 I looked ahead to 2023 and offered these words, "In the year ahead, 2023, it is my prayerful wish that we would work together to develop a unified mission and clear vision for the future of Ascension Lutheran Church." I offered a plan and some objectives which included:

1. **Self-development:** how are we growing in faith, in study of the holy scriptures and in our own discipleship?

continued on page 2

Mount Calvary Cemetery

1715 Middletown Road
McKees Rocks, PA 15136
Robert J. Dudek, Supervisor
mtcalvarycem@alcpgh.com



Mount Calvary Cemetery Board

Judy Henry • Bob Hughes • Bette Ann Kallay
Jason Eager • George C Kasich
Joyce Leister • Pastor Joe Murdy

“The **GOSPEL** is
OUR MISSION –
FIRST, and
FOREMOST”
~ PJ

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

2. **Stewardship:** developing and equipping one another to be generous supporters of the mission God has called us to. Also understanding holistic stewardship.

3. **Outreach:** explore our ministry outside the church and how we care for our neighbors and those in need.

4. **Strengthening our own bond** and relationship with one another through fellowship and faith formation.

I would like to see us continue to grow in these areas and develop goals and strategies for growth in the year 2024. Much like a new year's resolution, my resolutions are the same as the last.

I am excited for 2024! We have a great council, great leadership and a constant flow of new ideas and opportunities.

Finally, I want to offer a further word of gratitude for the sabbatical this past summer. Although it was hardly restful, it was restorative. I am grateful for those who stepped up and stepped in to help lead.

The Lord has good things in store for us in 2024 church, *I know it!*

Let's be better and do more than we've ever done! Why? Because God has called us to do great things!

With love and gratitude,

PJ+

Excerpted from
Ascension Church 2023 Bulletin of Reports
January 28, 2024





Social Ministry and Evangelism

S.A.L.T. Meeting Overview

Serving As Lutherans Together

Upcoming plans:

February

-Feb 11: Shrove Sunday pancake breakfast following service. Extra helping hands welcome!

March

-Food Bank collection (throughout Lent)

April

-April 20: Church/roadway spring clean up

-Autism awareness talk/walk (date TBD by Mary Thompson)

May

-Veterans clothing collection

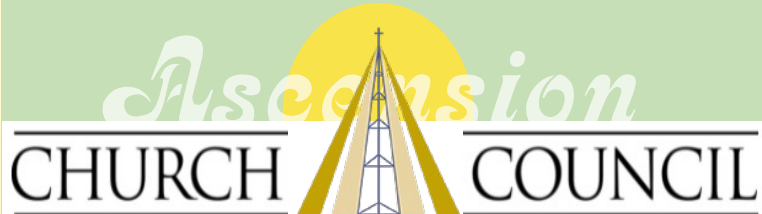
JUNE - YARD SALE!

Please mark your calendars for the Yard Sale on June 8th. If anyone has any connections for good community advertising, please let the SALT committee know. (Also, feel free to post on community groups/forums on our behalf!) SALT member Jamie Cropper is looking into getting a sign made to hang over Silver Lane that can be used for future years.

Upcoming SALT meetings for 2024:

•April 28 •July 21 •Sept 22

Please reach out to Pastor Murdy or Sharon Giza (Fellowship, Social Ministry & Evangelism liaison) to join these essential efforts in the life of our church.



ALC Council Meeting Highlights

Council meeting was held Tuesday Jan 9, 2024

- Review Minutes of Last Meeting: Motion to accept by Pastor, second by Jason. Passed unanimously.
- President: discussion on filling vacant council seat. Council agrees to leave seat open and discuss again at our next meeting. We believe this is harmony with our constitutional provisions.
- Officer Elections: President, *Jeff Williams*; Vice President, *Jason Eager*; Secretary, *Thom Kruise*; Treasurer, *Bob Thompson*.
- Liaison selections: Christian Education, *Pastor*; Youth, *Chelsea*; Communications and Publications, *Jason*; Fellowship, Social Ministry and Evangelism, *Sharon*; Finance and Stewardship, *John*; Property, *Phil*; Worship and Music, *Thom*; Mutual Ministry, *Jeff*; Personnel, *Thom and John*.
- Important dates:
 - January Congregational Meeting date: Sunday January 28
 - Council meeting: Tuesday, February 13th at 7:00 pm
- Adjournment: Motion by Jason, second by John, 8:03 pm.



Happy Valentine's Day!

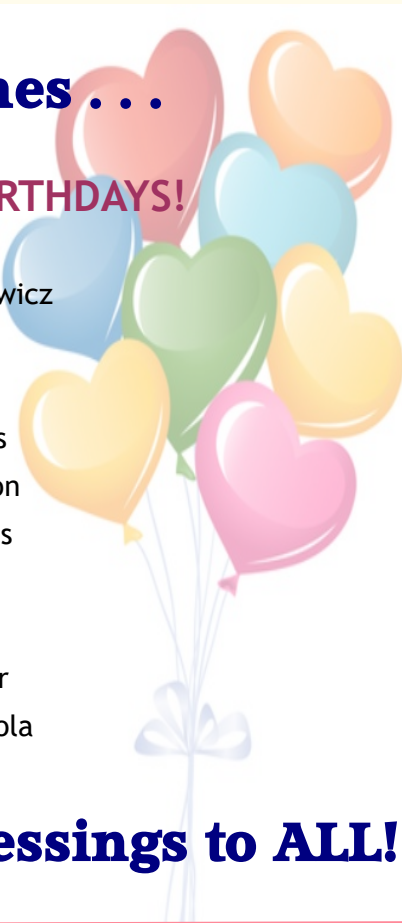
Wednesday February 14

Best Wishes . . .

FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS!

Date | Member / Friend

- 6 Brittany Bielewicz
Sue Thomson
- 8 Mary Hughes
- 11 Cindy Stathers
- 13 Nora Thompson
- 15 Conner Hughes
- 20 Bob Dudek
- 21 Marion Cerar
- 24 Jamie Cropper
- 27 Audriana DeCola



. . . and Blessings to ALL!

go NEWS?

If you have pictures, articles, or ideas to submit for the **MARCH 2024** Newsletter, please contact the office or Pastor, or email office@alcpgh.com.

Lunch Bunch



A monthly gathering of members and friends of Ascension Church

Join Ascension's LUNCH BUNCH Feb. 15

In January, 18 "Lunch Bunchers" visited Downey's House in Robinson Township for their first gathering of the new year 2024. Little did everyone know that it wasn't really a house nor would they meet anyone named Downey. The visit wasn't a "Down"er though, since the food was quite good, and as is customary for these gatherings, way too much, so a good number of take-out containers were spotted leaving the establishment. And as always, the company was great and we enjoyed the conversations.

On Thursday Feb. 15, the Bunch will escape Pittsburgh's icy gales for a **Bahama Breeze** adventure. We plan to blow in at 11:30 am on said date and coordinates (6100 Robinson Center Drive) Flowered shirts, sunglasses, flip-flops and beach comber hats are optional, but a GOOD appetite is highly recommended. Let Nancy Schreiber (412-859-3969) or Jerry Wessel (412-787-1213) know by Tuesday Feb. 13 if you plan to attend, so that enough reservations may be made. **All are invited to take a break from 'Burgh weather!**

~ Jerry Wessel

mmmmmmmmMARDI GRAS SUNDAY PANCAKE BREAKFAST!



Join us for a **Pancake Breakfast** as we prepare for Lent!

Sunday, February 11th after worship in the Fellowship Hall, come and indulge in fresh, made-to-order pancakes with all the fixins!

Help is also needed in setting up (Saturday Feb 10th at 12 p.m.) and cleaning up after the event

QUESTIONS? Please contact Debbie Whitfield at 412-951-8409 or email debw1216@hotmail.com to get on board.

Come one, come all, let's have some fun!



Soup and Service begins Wednesday, February 21st

HELD WEDNESDAY EVENINGS

February 21st & 28th MARCH 6th - 13th - 20th

Soup, salad and bread are offered

6:00-7:00 pm

- Midweek Service celebrated 7:00-7:30 pm
(No Midweek Service during Holy Week)

Please consider signing up to bring soup (two varieties are offered weekly), salad or bread.

Decadent Heralds of Lent

In pre-Christian times, the last few weeks of winter were typically the last opportunities for people to eat well, since the food they had stored up would begin running out. Following this period of plenty, there often would be a time of hunger until the spring. Thus, in the era of Christianity to follow, the season of Lent also followed this same path to Spring with a logical and extreme celebrations in excess by holding events such as Carnival and Mardi Gras (Fat Tuesday). Fat Tuesday is observed around the world, especially in Poland, where it also is referred to as “*ostatki*,” which literally means “leftovers” - reinforcing the practice of finishing any indulgent leftover foods or sweets before the sacrificial days of Lent. And so, *paczki* were born!

Just what are *paczki*?

Paczki are round, puffy, fluffy, fruit-filled donuts, often sprinkled with powdered sugar or topped with a sugar glaze. The most popular flavors of these poufs of deliciousness include apricot, fruit jelly, lemon curd, apple, blueberry, custard, raspberry, cherry, strawberry and the decidedly European favorite – prune (lekvar)!

So, how do you pronounce *paczki*?

“P+own+ch+key,” not “poonch-key!” The Polish “ą” sound has a nasal quality, as in the word “own.”

Is *paczki* singular or plural?

Paczki actually IS the plural. The singular form of *paczki* is “*paczek*.” Most likely the reason that no one ever uses that word in singular form is because - as the old potato chip commercial used to say - “you can’t eat just one!”

ASH WEDNESDAY

**February 14
2024**



ASH WEDNESDAY SERVICE – February 14

**7:00 pm: Service of Holy Communion
with the Imposition of Ashes**

**Join us at Ascension Church as we enter the
Great Lent on Ash Wednesday, February 14th.**



****If you have old palms at home, in your car or laying around, please bring them to church ASAP before Feb. 14. The palms which we once blessed to raise our Hallelujah become for us a sign of renewal and repentance on Ash Wednesday.*

Are *paczki* always made to be sweet?

In modern times, yes - but originally and historically - no. Early in the history of this pre-Lenten specialty, *paczki* actually were made with pork fat and fried in lard. (And you thought that *today*’s versions aren’t such a healthy choice!) For many Poles, *paczki* were a very practical food, because they afforded the opportunity for people of modest means to frugally use all of their leftover butter, lard, sugar and other lavish ingredients before Lent. Early *paczki* also had a much denser texture and had no yeast.

In Poland, *Paczki* Day is actually celebrated on the *Thursday* of the week before Ash Wednesday. This year, it takes place on Thursday February 8. Here in the USA, *Paczki* Day traditionally is observed on Shrove Tuesday (this year on February 13th), the day before Ash Wednesday.



THANK YOU!

For your year-round **generous contributions** to keep our church running smoothly and enable us to help others as we faithfully follow our mission

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

PLEASE NOTE:

Giving Statements* for 2023 are awaiting pickup in the church hallway Feb 4, 11 & 18. Please be sure to attend a service and pick up!

**All Giving Statements remaining after Sunday Feb 18 will be mailed via USPS.*



Paintings coming soon!

Good Shepherd painting has been completed and the Ascension is underway!

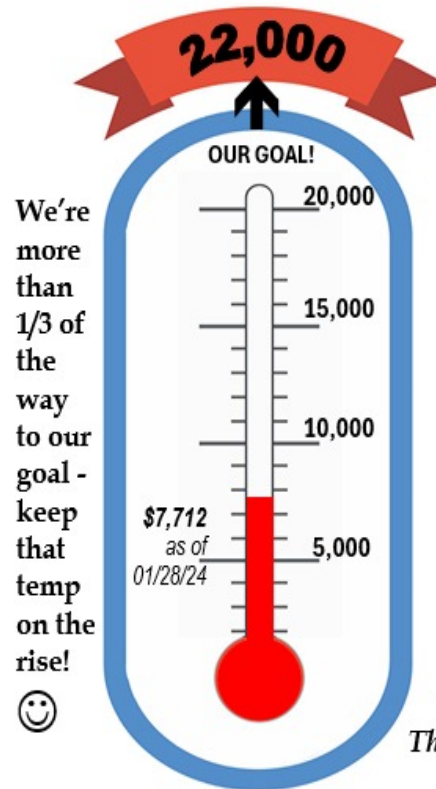
I hope you are looking forward to something new and beautiful in our sanctuary this year!

Our paintings - one of Christ the Good Shepherd and the other of The Ascension - are still on track to be

presented on Easter morning. Both paintings are intended to memorialize and celebrate both our 2021 merger and those who now rest in the Kingdom. It is my continued hope that these paintings will celebrate our story and what God has done in our lives.

~ PJ

TEMPERATURE ON THE RISE...



You can greatly help to fund this new Special Project by directing a portion of your Sunday offering to | **“OTHER”** on your giving envelope or write “e-Sign” on your pew envelope offering. Thank you for your support!

CONGRATULATIONS ARE IN ORDER . . .

Ascension members, sisters Emilia and Charlotte DeCola, qualified for the Academic Games competition at Montour this year.

Emilia tied for second place in the middle school division and **Charlotte** qualified in the elementary division.

Congratulations, girls!

Each year David E. Williams Middle School gifted students are challenged to use higher level thinking skills in math, language arts and social studies through student participation in local Academic Games Leagues of America competitions. Winners then aspire to qualify for the national competition.

Way to go, DeCola family!

Source: Allegheny West Magazine Jan/Feb. 2024 p 28

LESSER FESTIVALS & commemorations

February 2 Presentation of Our Lord

Forty days after the birth of Christ we mark the day Mary and Joseph presented him in the temple in accordance with Jewish law. There a prophetess named Anna began to speak of the redemption of Israel when she saw the young child. Simeon also greeted Mary and Joseph. He responded to the presence of the consolation of Israel in this child with the words of the *Nunc dimittis*. His song described Jesus as a "light for the nations." Because of the link between Jesus as the light for the nations, and because an old reading for this festival contains a line from the prophet Zephaniah, "I will search Jerusalem with candles," the day is also known as Candlemas, a day when candles are blessed for the coming year.

February 3 Ansgar, Bishop of Hamburg *Missionary to Denmark and Sweden, d. 865*

Ansgar was a monk who led a mission to Denmark and later to Sweden, where he built the first church. His work ran into difficulties with the rulers of the day, and he was forced to withdraw into Germany, where he served as a bishop in Hamburg. Despite his difficulties in Sweden, he persisted in his mission work and later helped consecrate Gothbert as the first bishop of Sweden. Ansgar had a deep love for the poor. He would wash their feet and serve them food provided by the parish.

February 5 The Martyrs of Japan, d. 1597

In the sixteenth century, Jesuit missionaries, followed by Franciscans, introduced the Christian faith in Japan. But a promising beginning to those missions—perhaps as many as 300,000 Christians by the end of the sixteenth century—met complications from competition between the missionary groups, political difficulty between Spain and Portugal, and factions within the government of Japan. Christianity was suppressed. By 1630, Christianity was driven underground. Today we commemorate the first martyrs of Japan, twenty-six missionaries and converts who were killed by crucifixion. Two hundred and fifty years later, when Christian missionaries returned to Japan, they found a community of Japanese Christians that had survived underground.

February 14

Cyril, monk, d. 869 and Methodius, bishop, d. 885
missionaries to the Slavs

These two brothers from a noble family in Thessalonika in northeastern Greece were priests and missionaries. After some early initial missionary work by Cyril among the Arabs, the brothers retired to a monastery. They later were sent to work among the Slavs, the missionary work for which they are most known. Since "Slavonic" had no written form at the time, the brothers established a written language with the Greek alphabet as its basis. They translated the scriptures and the liturgy using this new Cyrillic alphabet. The Czechs, Serbs, Croats, Slovaks, Ruthenians and Bulgars regard the brothers as the founders of Slavic literature. The brothers' work in preaching and worshiping in the language of the people are honored by Christians in both East and West.

February 18 Martin Luther *renewer of the church, d. 1546*

On this day in 1546, Martin Luther died at the age of sixty-two. For a time, he was an Augustinian monk, but it is his work as a biblical scholar, translator of the Bible, public confessor of the faith, reformer of the liturgy, theologian, educator, and father of German vernacular literature that holds him in our remembrance. In Luther's own judgment, the greatest of all of his works was his catechism, written to instruct people in the basics of faith. And it was his baptism that sustained him in his trials as a reformer.

February 23 Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna *martyr, d. 156*

Because he is said to have been known by John, the author of Revelation, as well as the important early church fathers Irenaeus and Ignatius, Polycarp serves as a vital link in church history. He was burned at the stake at age 86 for refusing to renounce his faith.

February 25 Elizabeth Fedde *deaconess, d. 1921*

Fedde was born in Norway and trained as a deaconess. In 1882, at the age of thirty-two, she was asked to come to New York to minister to the poor and to Norwegian seafarers. Her influence was wide-ranging, and she established the Deaconess House in Brooklyn and the Deaconess House and Hospital of the Lutheran Free Church in Minneapolis. She returned home to Norway in 1895 and died there.



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

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PLACE
STAMP
HERE

