



# THE MESSENGER

## ASCENSION LUTHERAN CHURCH

December 2025

### WEEKLY EVENTS

Sunday Worship - 11:00 AM

Sunday School - 10:00 AM (*adult & child*)

Drum Class - Tuesdays 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 &  
Wednesday evenings (*Spring-Fall*)



### **2025 COUNCIL**

President – *Sharon Giza*

Vice President – *Deb Whitfield*

Treasurer – *Bob Stathers*

Secretary – *Jason Eager*

### 2025 COUNCIL LIAISONS

Christian Education

*Jason Eager*

Communications & Publications

*Sharon Giza*

Finance & Stewardship

*open*

Mutual Ministry

*Bob Stathers*

Personnel

*Kelly Bryan*

Property

*Bob Thompson*

Fellowship, Social Ministry

and Evangelism;

Worship & Music

*Jeff Williams*

Youth

*Debbie Whitfield*

Call Committee

*Sharon Giza*

Council Member: *Bill Whitfield*

### Next Council Meeting

Tuesday December 9 at 7:00 PM

## Scatter the Darkness

*A message from Interim Pastor Ryan Kobert*

“The LIGHT  
shines in the  
darkness,  
and the  
darkness  
did not  
overcome it.”

– *John 1:5*



*Pastor Kobert also serves  
St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran  
Church in Sewickley, Pa.*

This time of year seems to pull at us in various ways, with family gatherings during the holidays, with the desire to give and receive gifts, or with this need to be with friends or others in some sort of activity. We try to be doing something with our time to keep us occupied and focused. Summer is gone and the time of sitting outside enjoying the shade, a cold drink, and a breeze is over. We distract ourselves because who wants to sit, look outside, and see darkness at 5 PM? Certainly not me.

There is something about the darkness that pulls at us, drawing us into ourselves and filling us with dread. There are nights where I lie awake in the darkness, my mind wandering from place to place, thinking about what needs to be done, or what mistakes I may have made, or other paths that are less than joyous. I know that I am not alone in this either. When I recognize that these paths are where my mind is going, I make a conscious effort to talk to God and I remember this verse:

*continued on page 4*

# MOUNT CALVARY CEMETERY

1715 Middletown Road | McKees Rocks, PA

*Robert J. Dudek, Superintendent*

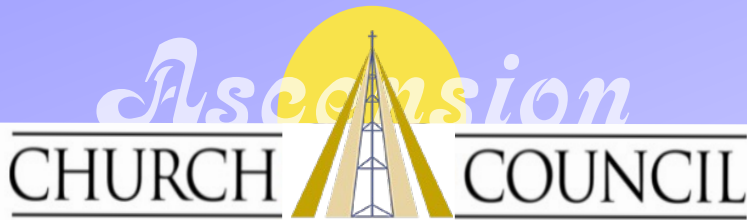
[mtcalvarycem@alcpgh.com](mailto:mtcalvarycem@alcpgh.com)

## Mount Calvary Cemetery Board Members

*Judy Henry • Bob Hughes • Bette Ann Kallay*

*George C. Kasich • Joyce Leister*

*Pastor Ryan Kobert • Deb Whitfield*



## ALC Council Meeting Highlights

**Council meeting was held Tuesday November 11, 2025**

**Call to order** at 7:02 pm. All attending except Bob S.  
October minutes approved.

**President's report Sharon:** all 4 Council nominees voted in. Jeff W. voted to Cemetery Board. Review will be conducted to determine quorum for congregational voting

**VP's report Deb:** Cemetery Board has met twice. 3 burials, 1 cremation in October.

**Treasurer's report via Bob T.:** Oct. expenses out-paced giving due to purchase of the new stove.

**Old Business:** New locks & cameras to be installed; Council & Cemetery elections 11/09/25; Pastor Kobert interim contract renewal; Committee on exploring alternative to ELCA update; plan for distributing information to the congregation; vote for ELCA affiliation will be by simple majority vote on 12/7/25.

**New Business:** Reviewed Church Budget and Cemetery Budget; Children's Christmas Program during worship December 14<sup>th</sup>, Cookie exchange on the same day; Question raised: would kids be interested in playing at St. Paul's for the 4pm Advent concert; Ascension Christmas Eve Service December 24<sup>th</sup> at 7pm; Request for membership received from Andrew Caswell and Liz Beach.

### **Important dates:**

Congregational Meeting Sunday Dec. 7 following worship

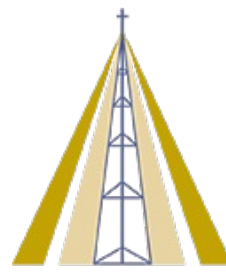
December Council meeting Tuesday Dec. 9 at 7pm

Children's program Sunday Dec. 14

Christmas Eve Service Wednesday December 24<sup>th</sup> at 7pm

**Adjournment: & Closing prayer:** 8:29 pm

**Next Council meeting: Tuesday, December 9 at 7 pm**



*Council President's*  
**CORNER**



**December will be a joyful and busy month here at Ascension Lutheran Church!**

- **December 7** – We will hold our church and cemetery budget meeting, followed by a special congregation vote regarding the ELCA.
- **December 14** – Our youth will share a Christmas hymn during worship, and afterward we'll gather in the social room for punch and cookies. A cookie exchange will also take place for those who wish to participate.
- **Angel Tree Gifts** – Soon, gifts for the residents at Merakey will be available to donate and distribute. This tradition always brings smiles and joy to their holiday season.
- **December 21** – Our choir will present the Cantata, lifting our spirits with their beautiful voices.
- **December 24 at 7:00 PM** – We will gather for our **Christmas Eve Candlelight Service**, celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ together.

We encourage you to join us for these special events and invite a relative or friend to come along. We love seeing new faces in our pews and sharing the warmth of the season with all.

Wishing you a blessed Advent  
and a Merry Christmas!

With joy,

**Sharon Giza**

*Ascension Lutheran Church Council President*

# 2026•2026•2026

## **ATTENTION Giving Envelope users!**

Giving envelopes for 2026 will be ready  
for pickup at the Sunday December 7  
Congregational Meeting  
following worship.



# Joy and Rewards

*Reflecting with Nancy Jacobs*

"Suffer the little children...." Or maybe as a church community, we should read that as "the little children suffer." In our surrounding communities there are many degrees of suffering by families - and I use the term indiscriminately - some without a father, some with drug use, some with part-time moms.

The ELCA laments about not having enough young people entering the ministry. Well, is anyone taking enough time to educate or encourage very young children to become involved in the church? I was 5 years old when I started Sunday School (Ruth Beyer was my teacher) and 85+ years later, I'm still around.

Let's not be so busy worrying about what is wrong with the church constitution (of which I admit I am somewhat ignorant but I still manage to worship God), and instead focus on being Lutheran through every age and stage of life. Yes, I am not so happy at the thoughts of a non-Lutheran pastor preaching his/her denomination's beliefs to me, but if we and our church leaders don't foster more fervor and entice the young to take the lead, then we can't really complain about a shortage of Lutheran ministers to carry on.

Now imagine the wonder of a young child who never experienced the friendliness of another young child or a caring adult, or never having been exposed to bible stories, being brought to our Sunday School for the first time. I think the joy - and the rewards - would be two-fold.

There must be some way to open our doors to kids such as these. Please tell me how I can help.



## ***Please keep in your prayers:***

- JoAnne Erwin, Dee Gratzmiller, Norma Kohnen, Lottie Lodge, Jean Marion, Betty Simpson, Rose Rahner, Betty Borden – *shut-ins*
- Mary Jane McGinnis – *health concerns*
- Thad Ritter – *health concerns*
- Bill McEwen – *multiple health concerns*
- Linda Younkers, mother of Kathleen Howells – *stage 4 cancer*
- Hogan Moody, friend of Cy & Kathleen Howells – *cancer*
- Pastor Joe Murdy *as he serves his 9-month Army tour of duty in Kuwait*
- Tom Walenchok – brother-in-law of Deb Walenchok – *lung & brain cancer*
- Amy – friend of Deb Walenchok – *rare form of cancer*
- Silas – 9-year-old grandson of Cy & Kathleen Howells – *recovery from brain tumor surgery*
- Nancy Jacobs – *at Caring Heights for recovery & rehab*
- Monica Esposito – Walenchoks' daughter-in-law *recovery from recent surgery*

## **SUNDAY WORSHIP ASSISTANT SCHEDULE DECEMBER 2025**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Supply</u>	<u>Assisting Minister</u>	<u>Communion Assistant</u>	<u>Lector</u>	<u>Usher</u>	<u>Acolyte</u>	<u>Sunday (or special)</u>	<u>color</u>	<u>Council Update</u>
Dec 7	Pr. Ryan Kobert	Jennifer Burkholder	Avis Ritter	Thad Ritter	Volunteer	Volunteer	ADVENT 2	BLUE	Deb Whitfield
Dec 14	Pr. Ryan Kobert	Dan Giza	Jeff Williams	Rich Mussman	Volunteer	Volunteer	ADVENT 3	BLUE	Sharon Giza
Dec 21	Pr. Ryan Kobert	Mary Thompson	Al Morrow	Gib Palmgren	Volunteer	Volunteer	ADVENT 4	BLUE	Bob Stathers
Dec 24	Pr. Ryan Kobert	TBA	TBA	Rich Mussman	Volunteer	Volunteer	CHRISTMAS EVE	WHITE	n/a
Dec 28	Carol Emch	Jeff Williams	Bob Thompson	Charlotte DeCola	Volunteer	Volunteer	1 CHRISTMAS	BLUE	Deb Whitfield

## DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS!

Date	Member/Friend
3	Donald Simpson
4	Val Tarbert
6	Travis McEwen
7	Ryan Bayer
10	Dorothy Barkley
12	Jeanne Rose
13	Natalie Rodriguez
14	Paxton Brown
16	Debora Whitfield
18	Judy Henry
19	Lauren Bayer
	Dylan Siemons
21	Rudy Marnich Sr.
22	Isabella Bryan
29	Jake Zoltun



## DECEMBER ANNIVERSARY

Date	Members/Friends
4	Jeff & Deb Williams

**Fond wishes & blessings to ALL!**

**Scatter the Darkness** (continued from pg 1)

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." With the flick of a light switch, or the lighting of a candle, the darkness is scattered. It seeks to hide behind objects, casting shadows on the far wall. Even this shadow is greatly diminished because of the light that shines. This is what we see in God coming down into the world, that the darkness which Jesus confronts is scattered.

We celebrate at this time of year the season of Advent, of preparation and anticipation. We build up the light each week as a new candle is lit to further scatter the darkness while awaiting the single light of Christ which banishes all darkness. These candles remind us that Christ IS the light, the one who shines in our hearts, who banishes the darkness of sin, and who leads us through the darkness of death and into life.

As you are pulled this way and that by meals, activities, chores, shopping, and work, seek out a bit of time to sit with a lit candle. Watch as the darkness scatters at its lighting and recite this short verse. May its light scatter not only the darkness around you, but within you as well.

~ Pastor Ryan Kobert

### Ascension's Youth & Family Committee Events

## 2025

**Dec** - Presents for Patients

**Dec 14** - Cookie Exchange, Children's Christmas Program, Cookies & Punch after worship

## 2026

**Jan 17** - Family Ice Skating

**Feb 15** - Family Bowling

**Mar 15** - "Lucky to be Lutheran" Family Bingo

**Apr 19** - Spring clean-up, creating planters, Chalk the Walk

**May** - Activity Bingo





# NOTICE

## Voting requirements

According to C8.02 (per our constitution), to be considered a voting member, *you must fulfill the following:*

- Be a member of Ascension Lutheran Church,
- and**
- Have taken communion in the current or preceding calendar year,
- and**
- Must have made a contribution in the preceding or current calendar year of record - which would be **by November 30, 2025** - in order for it to have been recorded to the church records.

Thank you,  
*Ascension Lutheran Church Council*



## Congregational Meeting Sunday

**December 7, 2025**  
Following worship

This important meeting is being held to:

- **Approve the 2026 budgets** for both Ascension Lutheran Church and Mount Calvary Cemetery.
- **Vote on a special motion** regarding whether Ascension Lutheran Church should explore alternative affiliations to the ELCA.

## Presents for Patients



For Christmas 2025, Ascension Church members once again will have the opportunity to bring some happiness to others by participating in a “**Presents for Patients**” gifting event. These “Angel Tree” gifts will be given to the patients at Merakey Allegheny Valley. We ask for donations of special gifts for the patients who have shared their wish lists with us. Tags with each patient’s info will be posted on the church hallway display board.

## Saturday Dec. 6<sup>th</sup> Pastor Kobert takes the PLUNGE at Lutherlyn

to help provide camperships for kids next summer!

Help him reach his \$1,000 goal by sponsoring his icy adventure at

**[www.lutherlyn.com/plungeme](http://www.lutherlyn.com/plungeme)**

“\$1,000 is my goal, but if we of Ascension and St. Paul’s (plus family and friends) can reach \$1,500 -

**I will take the Plunge in a duck costume!”**

Every contribution helps! Visit the web site or **SIGN UP** at the podium in the church narthex. **THANK YOU!**



It’s time to

**Order Your**

**Poinsettias!**



Poinsettias are ready to order for Christmas! Be assured from our professional floral friends at 2 Buds Floral Designs that these are quality plants which will enhance any space where they are placed - especially around the altar of our Lord as we await his coming!

So please consider ordering a plant or two to adorn our worship space, and in turn beautify your home into the new year!

**Order forms are available in the church narthex. Sunday December 7 is the last day to order.**




# Helping Hands!

Ascension's Youth Group proudly share some photos from their service project on Sunday November 16! A special thank-you to the Creative Hands ladies who prepped the materials so that our kiddos could create beautiful warm blankets which will be donated to those in need.

*Photos by Melissa DeCola*



**Christmas Eve Worship**  
at Ascension Church  
Wednesday, December 24<sup>th</sup> - 7 pm



**HOLDEN EVENING PRAYER**

**Advent Midweek Services**  
7 p.m. WEDNESDAYS: Dec. 3 10, 17

Join us as we await the newborn King throughout the season of Advent through our midweek services of Holden Evening Prayer. This unique contemplative worship service originally was written during the winter of 1986 while the composer, Marty Haugen, was in residence at Holden Village in the North Cascade mountains of Washington state. A remote wilderness community and retreat center, Holden is rooted in the Lutheran tradition which welcomes all people. Ascension Church has long enjoyed this beautiful service (about 30 mins).

We hope that you will join us on Wednesdays - Dec. 3 10, 17 throughout this sacred Advent season.

Unsure of driving in the dark?  
Please just ask for a ride! Come take a break from the busy world and join us for worship.



# DECEMBER

## LESSER FESTIVALS & commemorations

### **December 3 - Francis Xavier** *missionary to Asia* d. 1552

Francis Xavier (ZAYV-yehr) was born in the Basque region of northern Spain, later becoming a missionary to India, Southeast Asia, Japan, and the Philippines. At each point he learned the local language and, like Martin Luther, wrote catechisms for the instruction of new converts. Together with Ignatius Loyola and five others, Francis formed the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). Francis spoke out against the Spanish and Portuguese colonists when he discovered their oppression of the indigenous people to whom he was sent as a missionary.

### **December 4 - John of Damascus** *theologian, hymnwriter* d. ca. 749

Born to a wealthy family in Damascus and well educated, John left a career in finance and government to become a monk in an abbey near Jerusalem. He wrote many hymns as well as theological works. Foremost among the latter is a work called *The Fount of Wisdom*, which touches on philosophy, heresy, and the orthodox faith. This summary of patristic theology remained influential for centuries.

### **December 6 - Nicholas, Bishop of Myra** d. ca. 342

Though Nicholas is one of the church's most beloved saints, little is known about his life. In the fourth century he was a bishop in what is now Turkey. Legends that surround Nicholas tell of his love for God and neighbor, especially the poor. One famous story tells of Nicholas secretly giving bags of gold to the three daughters of a father who was going to sell them into prostitution because he was unable to provide dowries for them. Nicholas has become a symbol of anonymous gift giving.

### **December 7 - Ambrose, Bishop of Milan** d. 397

Ambrose was a governor of northern Italy and a catechumen when he was elected bishop of Milan. He was baptized, ordained, and consecrated a bishop all on the same day. While bishop he gave away his wealth and lived in simplicity. He was a famous preacher and is largely responsible for the conversion of Augustine. He is also well known for writing hymns. On one occasion, Ambrose led people in a hymn he wrote while the church in which they were secluded was threatened by attack from Gothic soldiers, who turned away, unwilling to attack a congregation that was singing a hymn. Ambrose is credited with authorship of three hymns in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, including "Savior of the Nations, Come" (ELW 263).

### **December 13 - Lucy** *Martyr* d. 304

Lucy was a young Christian of Sicily who was martyred during the persecutions under Emperor Diocletian. Apparently she had decided to devote her life to God and her possessions to the poor. Beyond that, however, little is known for certain about Lucy. However, her celebration became particularly important in Sweden and Norway, perhaps because the feast

of Lucia (the name means "light") originally fell on the shortest day of the year. A tradition arose of a girl in the household, wearing a crown of candles, bringing saffron rolls to her family early in the morning on the day of Lucia.

### **December 14 - John of the Cross** *renewer of the church* d. 1591

John was a monk of the Carmelite religious order who met Teresa of Ávila when she was working to reform the Carmelite Order and return it to a stricter observance of its rules. He followed Teresa's lead and encouraged others to follow her reform. He was imprisoned when he encountered opposition to the reform. His writings, like Teresa's, reflect a deep interest in mystical thought and meditation. In one of John's poems, "The Spiritual Canticle," he cried, "Oh, that my griefs would end! Come, grant me thy fruition full and free!"

### **December 20 - Katharina von Bora** *Luther*

*renewer of the church* d. 1552

Born to an impoverished nobleman, when Katharina (Katie) was five her mother died and she was sent to live in a convent. She later took vows as a nun, but around age twenty-four she and several other nuns who were influenced by the writings of Martin Luther left the convent. Six children were born to Katie and Martin. Though initially Luther felt little affection for Katie, she proved herself a gifted household manager and became a trusted partner. She was so influential that Luther took to calling her "my lord Katie."

### **December 26 - Stephen** *Deacon and Martyr*

Stephen was a deacon and the first martyr of the church. He was one of those seven upon whom the apostles laid hands after they had been chosen to serve widows and others in need. Later, Stephen's preaching angered the temple authorities, and they ordered him to be put to death by stoning.

### **December 27 - John** *Apostle and Evangelist*

John, the son of Zebedee, was a fisherman and one of the Twelve. John, his brother James, and Peter were the three who witnessed the light of the Transfiguration. John and James once made known their desire to hold positions of power in the kingdom of God. Jesus' response showed them that service to others was the sign of God's reign in the world. Tradition has attributed authorship of the gospel and the three epistles bearing his name to the apostle John, as well as Revelation.

### **December 28 - The Holy Innocents** *Martyrs*

The infant martyrs commemorated on this day were the children of Bethlehem, two years old and younger, who were killed by Herod, who worried that his reign was threatened by the birth of a new king. Augustine called these innocents "buds, killed by the frost of persecution the moment they showed themselves." Those linked to Jesus through their youth and innocence encounter the same hostility Jesus encounters later in his ministry.



# Advent & Christmas 2025



**Please join us for  
Worship and Fellowship**

## Social & Congregational Events

Dec. 7 - Ascension: Congregational Meeting following 11am worship.  
Dec. 14 - Ascension: 11am worship with Children's program; Social & Cookie Exchange after worship.  
St. Paul's Sewickley: Advent Concert at 4:00 pm followed by fellowship reception

## Ascension Advent Sundays:

Advent 1 November 30  
Advent 2 December 7  
Advent 3 December 14  
Advent 4 December 21

worship time is 11 am

## MIDWEEK ADVENT SERVICES

Wednesdays at  
Ascension Church  
December 3, 10, 17  
at 7:00 pm

## CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE

Wednesday December 24, 2025

5:00 pm - St. Paul's, Sewickley

7:00 pm - ASCENSION Robinson

9:00 pm - St. Paul's, Sewickley

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



## Contact Us

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## Ascension Lutheran Church

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Visit us on the web at

[www.alcpgh.com](http://www.alcpgh.com)

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PLACE  
STAMP  
HERE

