



# THE MESSENGER

## ASCENSION Lutheran Church

January 2026

### WEEKLY EVENTS

**Sunday Worship** - 11:00 AM

**Sunday School** - 10:00 AM

(adult weeks 2 & 4; child weekly)

**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** -Wednesday evenings (Spring-Fall)



### 2026 COUNCIL EXECUTIVES and 2026 COUNCIL LIAISONS

*New officer and liaison positions  
will be announced.*

#### Ascension Council Members for 2026:

**Sharon Giza**

**Joyce Leister**

**Katie Mercadante**

**Bob Stathers**

**Bob Thompson**

**Bill Whitfield**

**Deb Whitfield**

**Jeff Williams**

#### Next Council Meeting

Tuesday January 13 at 7:00 PM

## 2026: a New Year of thanks

*“<sup>3</sup> I thank my God for every remembrance of you, <sup>4</sup> always in every one of my prayers for all of you, praying with joy <sup>5</sup> for your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. <sup>6</sup> I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.”*

~ Philippians 1:3-6

*A message from  
Interim Pastor Ryan Kobert*

As part of my prayer practice, I give thanks to God for the life and ministry of each congregation that I have served alongside:

the congregations I grew up in, the teaching parish I worshiped with during seminary, the internship parishes that helped form me, the two congregations I have been called to, and the half-dozen other congregations that I have served as an interim for. I pray with thanksgiving for the generosity that I see among you all, and the joy that fills you as you serve the community around you in different ways.

This year I have seen the hallway filled with food donations and school supplies on several occasions, going to support families in the community. The passion of the quilting group to make blankets for those in need was easily seen when we blessed a hundred of them to be sent to areas affected by disasters. Gifts were sent to those in nursing homes, and there was great generosity for Camp Lutherlyn's campership fund this winter as well.

There is such joy in this generosity, yet it is often difficult to see the effects of it in the lives of those whom it touches. We will likely never know the folks who receive food from the food pantry, the ones wrapped in a warm blanket when all else is gone or hear the excited screams of campers playing games at Lutherlyn. In these instances, we have only faith that what we do matters to someone who needs it at that moment.

Though we won't see how this generosity affects the lives of so many people, I can say that what you do fills hearts with gratitude and thanksgiving. The generosity that you have shared with me this Christmas left me filled with gratitude and a deep appreciation for your continued support of the mission of this church. It also serves as a reminder that this open-handedness is how you approach all the ministries of the church, and on behalf of all those who are blessed by these ministries, thank you. ■

# MOUNT CALVARY CEMETERY

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



Mount Calvary Cemetery Board Members  
wish all a very Happy New Year 2026

*Bob Hughes • George C. Kasich • Joyce Leister  
Deb Whitfield • Jeff Williams • Pr Ryan Kobert  
Bette Ann Kallay, secretary • Judy Henry, treasurer*

## NOTICE

Installation of 2026 Church Council  
and Cemetery Board members will  
take place on Sunday Jan. 11, 2026.

Congregational Meeting with the  
2025 Bulletin of Reports will be held  
Sunday January 25, 2026.  
Committee chairs, please email your  
report for the 2025 year to the  
church office ([office@alcpgh.com](mailto:office@alcpgh.com))  
by January 18, 2026.

## **Ascension Youth & Family Committee 2026 EVENTS**

**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**

## **SUNDAY WORSHIP ASSISTANT SCHEDULE JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2026**

Date	Supply	Assisting Minister	Communion Assistant	Lector	Usher	Acolyte	Sunday (or special)	color
Jan 4	Pr. Ryan Kobert	Dan Giza	Avis Ritter	Thad Ritter	Volunteer	Volunteer	CHRISTMAS 2	WHITE
Jan 11	Pr. Ryan Kobert	Mary Thompson	Al Morrow	Sharon Giza	Volunteer	Volunteer	EPIPHANY Baptism of our Lord	WHITE
Jan 18	Pr. Ryan Kobert	Jennifer Burkholder	Mary Thompson	Rich Mussman	Volunteer	Volunteer	EPIPHANY 2	GREEN
Jan 25	Pr. Ryan Kobert	Dan Giza	Avis Ritter	Thad Ritter	Volunteer	Volunteer	EPIPHANY 3	GREEN
Feb 1	Pr. Ryan Kobert	Jeff Williams	Al Morrow	Jason Eager	Volunteer	Volunteer	EPIPHANY 4	GREEN
Feb 8	Pr. Ryan Kobert	Mary Thompson	Bob Thompson	Dan Giza	Volunteer	Volunteer	EPIPHANY 5	GREEN
Feb 15	Pr. Ryan Kobert	Jennifer Burkholder	Jeff Williams	Sharon Giza	Volunteer	Volunteer	TRANSFIGURATION	WHITE
Feb 22	Pr. Ryan Kobert	Dan Giza	Avis Ritter	Thad Ritter	Volunteer	Volunteer	LENT 1	PURPLE
Mar 1	Pr. Ryan Kobert	Jeff Williams	Al Morrow	Rich Mussman	Volunteer	Volunteer	LENT 2	PURPLE

**BIBLE STUDY AT  
ASCENSION CHURCH  
THURSDAYS @ 7 PM  
starting JAN. 8, 2026**

Under the guidance of longtime spiritualist and Ascension member Richard Mussman, sessions promise to be friendly, interactive, and "just right." Start your new year in meaningful conversation with friends and fellow believers about the "Good Book!" Bible Study will meet on Thursdays at 7:00 pm in Ascension's Fellowship Hall starting January 8, 2026.



# Council President's CORNER

Happy New Year!

## LOOKING AHEAD

As we look ahead, Ascension Lutheran Church also prepares for a new year. At our December 7, 2025 Congregational Meeting, the majority voted not to continue researching alternatives to the ELCA synod. We will move forward in the call process for a new pastor, and our Ministry Site Profile has been updated to reflect this decision.

## SOULS IN THE SEATS

One of our goals for the coming year is **"Souls in the Seats."** Your participation—through ideas, outreach, and shared enthusiasm—will be essential as we work together to grow our congregation. More information will be shared as Church Council and volunteers develop plans to move this initiative forward.

## THANK YOU

Thank you to everyone who helped make our Christmas celebrations so meaningful. The church looked beautiful, and the spirit of Christ's birth was felt throughout worship, fellowship, and our community outreach efforts.

## THE BEST IS YET TO COME!

We wish everyone a healthy and safe 2026.

Sincerely,

**Sharon Giza**

Ascension Church Council President

**NOTICE: 2025 Giving Statements  
will NOT be mailed automatically.**

Please notify the office if you  
need a Giving Statement for 2025.

**Thanks to everyone who participated  
in this year's "Presents for Patients."  
They truly enjoyed our carols & gifts!  
We are especially thankful for our  
members who participated to help  
deliver the presents and sing  
Christmas carols. Thank you all!**



## ALC Council Meeting Highlights

**Council meeting was held Tues. Dec. 9, 2025**

- AED check passed. Call to order: 7:01 pm
- Review Minutes of Last Meeting: Motion by Jeff to accept as amended, second by Deb. Motion passed unanimously.

All current members in attendance plus incoming members Joyce Leister and Katie Mercadante. Also in attendance was Pr. Peter Asplin.

- President: *Sharon Giza*, Supply agreement; vote results; disband research committee
- Vice-Pres: *Deb Whitfield* Mt. Calvary Cemetery updates; Pet Cemetery; income
- Installation of 2026 Council on Jan 11; Congregational Meeting Jan. 25: *Bulletin of Reports* due by Jan 18
- Kelly Bryan resignation from Council; solicit to fill open position
- Call Committee: MSP: Pastor Asplin advised to add revision to clarify the decision of the congregation to move forward; Discussed the process for full-time vs. part-time/shared options; Decision made to move forward with the Call Process for a full-time pastor
- Various reports made by Council Liaisons
- **Important dates:**
  - » Sunday January 11 installation of 2026 Council members
  - » Tuesday, January 13 Council meeting with election of officers
  - » 2026 Congregational Meeting Sunday January 28; *Bulletin of Reports* submissions due Jan 18.
- Adjournment: Motion by Jason; second by Deb.

**Next Council Meeting:  
Tuesday January 13, 2026 at 7 pm**

**Important upcoming date:  
Semi-Annual Congregational Meeting  
Sunday January 25, 2026**



# JANUARY

Date	Member/Friend
5	Daniel Giza
9	Philip Paladino
13	Bette Ann Kallay
14	Layla McEwen
15	Kelly Bryan
21	Alexis Brown
23	Darlene Witt
24	Glenn Simpson Nate Zoltun
27	Ryan Hughes Don Lucas Clay Marnich
28	Mark Marnich
31	Joyce Leister

**Best wishes & many blessings!**



# Lunch Bunch

*A monthly gathering of members and friends of Ascension Church*

**Join the LUNCH BUNCH Thursday  
Jan. 15 . . . it will be a real BREEZE!**

In December seventeen intrepid adventurers landed on the "Big Island." No, it wasn't Hawaii or even Manhattan but was scenic Neville Island - our best option close to town. We didn't see any palm trees or skyscrapers, but there was good food and camaraderie at Carmody's. There were also several other large, rowdy holiday groups, so the Ascension Lunch Bunch fit right in. We all had our fill of food and fun, with some of the food being carried home as leftovers.

Our island hopping continues in January with a trip to enjoy Bahama Breeze. On January 15, 2026 (hard to believe it's a new year already), we will meet at 11:30 AM at their location - 610 Robinson Center Drive by Robinson Mall. Given our usual Pittsburgh January weather, you should consider giving yourself the Bahama Breeze experience. Why not wear your islander outfit, sunglasses and order an island fruit drink? The food will be delicious-good, even if it isn't all-out luau style with a whole roast pig. Please let Jerry Wessel (412)787-1213 or George Kasich (412)726-1645 know by Tuesday January 13th if you plan to attend so that sufficient spots and beach umbrellas can be reserved. We hope to see you then!

~ Jerry Wessel

**A VERY MERRY TIME** on the Island was had by this happy and hungry group of seventeen Lunch Bunchers, who gathered on December 18 at Carmody's on Neville Island to enjoy some good food and great company before the holidays.

# THANK YOU!

## THANK YOU ONE AND ALL

for your generous year-round 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."*

## The 'PLUNGE'



Enjoy these photos of our "ducky" pastor Rev. Ryan Kobert as he braved the elements on December 6 to take the 2025 "Lutherlyn Plunge." Pastor Kobert thanks everyone who sponsored him for this annual fundraiser!



### **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 completes his 9-month Army tour of duty in Kuwait
- Tom Walenchok – brother-in-law of Deb Walenchok – *lung & brain cancer*
- Silas – 9-year-old grandson of Cy & Kathleen Howells – *recovery from brain tumor*
- Nancy Jacobs – *recuperating at home!*
- Monica Esposito – Walenchoks' daughter-in-law – *recovery from recent surgery*
- Pam Conway – former ALC member – *recuperating from recent knee surgery*
- Sharon Snatchko – John's mother – *currently undergoing cancer treatment*
- Mark Spieler – husband of Jennifer Burkholder's niece – *lung cancer*
- Deb Whitfield – *recovering from surgery*
- Deb Walenchok – *lung cancer*
- Jacob Pearson-Kunselman – great-nephew of Gib Palmgren – *injured in a New Year's Day accident*





## December 2025 certainly was filled with lots of events and activities!



- Dozens of delicious Christmas cookies were exchanged on December 14.



- On December 14, we welcomed new members Andrew Caswell and Liz Beach along with their beloved canine companion, Abby.



- Hundreds of visitors took a drive through the **Clinton Christmas Light Up Celebration** in Clinton, Pa. through January 3rd! Our ALC youth decorated our "Let Your Light Shine!" tree in neon to spread Christmas cheer and our message for the 2025 holiday season.

*Photos by Melissa DeCola and Sharon Giza*



- Christmas Eve at Ascension by candlelight as captured by Clay Marnich.

# 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 (transferred to Jan. 19)

• 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.

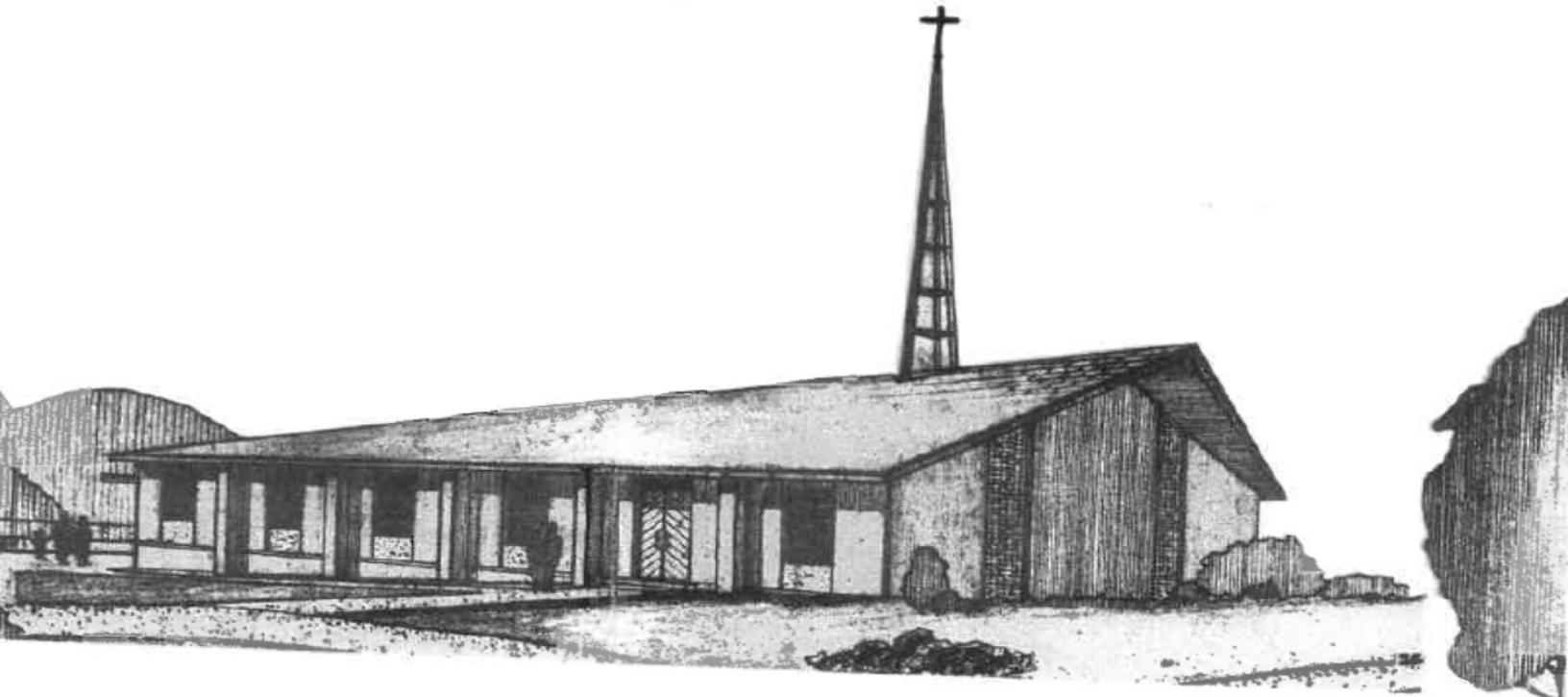
## January 27 Lydia, Dorcas and Phoebe

*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.***



**Contact Us**

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