



THE MESSENGER

ASCENSION Lutheran Church

February 2026

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
- Bible Study - 1st 3 Thursdays at 7:00 PM
- Soccer Shots - Saturday mornings &
Wednesday evenings (*Spring-Fall*)



2026 COUNCIL

- President – *Sharon Giza*
- Vice President – *Debbie Whitfield*
- Treasurer – *Bob Thompson*
- Secretary – *Katie Mercadante*

2026 COUNCIL LIAISONS

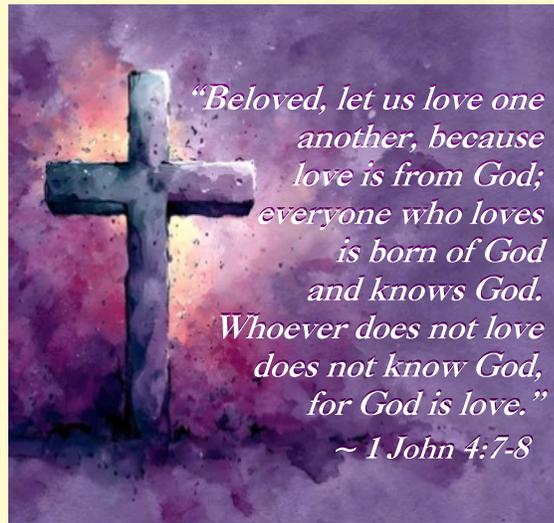
- Call Committee
Joyce Leister
- Christian Education
Jeff Williams
- Communications & Publications
Jeff Williams
- Fellowship, Social Ministry
& Evangelism
Debbie Whitfield
- Finance & Stewardship
Bob Stathers
- Mutual Ministry
Sharon Giza
- Personnel
Sharon Giza
- Property
Don Tarbert & Bill Whitfield
- Worship & Music
Katie Mercadante
- Youth
Katie Mercadante & Debbie Whitfield

Next Council Meeting

Tuesday February 10 at 7:00 PM

Share the love . . .

from Pastor Kobert's Desk



February is often marked by one holiday: Valentine's Day. Each year, countless couples will go to great lengths to express their love for one another through some sort of romantic gesture, gift giving, or a meal together. Valentine's cards and candy fill shelves just after the Christmas decorations are removed, and we are told that love is in the air.

There's another holiday that often occurs during February, one that we don't see advertised in

the seasonal section of the grocery store yet carries with it a vastly different and deep understanding of love: Ash Wednesday. I know that sounds sort of strange, because the common thing we remember about this day is the ashes on our heads and the words, "You are dust and to dust you shall return." But what of the deeper meaning behind these words? What of the symbolism behind the mark on our brows?

We are dust. Dust formed into a body, filled with organs and tissue, and then given breath, and with it our consciousness. That breath comes from God. This alertness to our world comes from that gift of life. Anyone who has spent time crafting something knows that there is a lot of love poured into that creation. We are dust that has been lovingly formed, filled with life, and loved into existence. Dust reminds us of our mortality, yes, but also that this dust was given life.

The dust that marks our foreheads on Ash Wednesday is oftentimes made into the shape of the cross. That cross marks the place where life and death intersect. Where we see Jesus give up his life to the power of death, where Jesus lays down all power to show that he too will experience what all people experience. The power of God's love is greater than death though. It is this love for us that drives God to atone for our sin by experiencing death. It was love that raised Christ from the death. It is in love that Christ's spirit is with us so that we might experience that same new life that he did.

continued on page 2

Mount Calvary Cemetery

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



Mount Calvary Cemetery Board Members

*Judy Henry • Bob Hughes • Bette Ann Kallay
 George C. Kasich • Pastor Kobert • Joyce Leister
 Debbie Whitfield • Jeff Williams*

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

At our baptism we are marked with the cross of Christ forever and filled with the Holy Spirit. Our entrance into this body of Christ begins with the cross and our death and subsequent new life also are marked with the cross. This cross shows the love God has for us, because God so loves this creation that God does not want us to ever be kept separate from God.

Ash Wednesday and the Lenten season is a time of reflection, and perhaps we can reflect this year on the love that God has shown to us, and how we can in turn reflect that love back out into the world. The first letter of John speaks of God as love, and in that letter, he urges us, saying, "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love."

Share love on more than just one day this month. Share it more than just this month too. Because this world does not need more heartless, loveless people who seek to bring others down, it needs true followers of Jesus who emulate the God who fills them with life. It needs more people who are willing to do what they can to live in love for others, to leave those they meet more loved than when they first met them. God does that for us, leaves us more loved than when we began, so let's do that for others. ■

SUNDAY WORSHIP ASSISTANT SCHEDULE FEBRUARY - MARCH 2026

Date	Supply	Assisting Minister	Communion Assistant	Lector	Usher	Acolyte	Sunday (or special)	color
Feb 1	Carol Emch	Jeff Williams	Al Morrow	Jason Eager	Volunteer	Volunteer	EPIPHANY 4	GREEN
Feb 8	Pr. Ryan Kobert	Mary Thompson	Bob Thompson	Gib Palmgren	Volunteer	Volunteer	EPIPHANY 5	GREEN
Feb 15	Pr. Ryan Kobert	Jennifer Burkholder	Avis Ritter	Thad Ritter	Volunteer	Volunteer	TRANSFIGURATION	WHITE
Feb 18	Pr. Ryan Kobert	Jeff Williams	Jennifer Burkholder	Rich Mussman	Volunteer	Volunteer	ASH WEDNESDAY	PURPLE
Feb 22	Pr. Ryan Kobert	Dan Giza	Jeff Williams	Sharon Giza	Volunteer	Volunteer	LENT 1	PURPLE
Mar 1	Pr. Ryan Kobert	Jeff Williams	Al Morrow	Melissa DeCola	Volunteer	Volunteer	LENT 2	PURPLE
Mar 8	Pr. Ryan Kobert	Mary Thompson	Bob Thompson	Jason Eager	Volunteer	Volunteer	LENT 3	PURPLE
Mar 15	Pr. Ryan Kobert	Jennifer Burkholder	Avis Ritter	Thad Ritter	Volunteer	Volunteer	LENT 4	PURPLE
Mar 22	Pr. Ryan Kobert	Jeff Williams	Jennifer Burkholder	Rich Mussman	Volunteer	Volunteer	LENT 5	PURPLE
Mar 29	Pr. Ryan Kobert	Mary Thompson	Bob Thompson	Sharon Giza	Volunteer	Volunteer	PALM SUNDAY	PURPLE



Council President's **CORNER**

A message from Council President Sharon Giza

The 2026 Church Council has elected its officers:

- Sharon Giza – President
- Deb Whitfield – Vice President
- Katie Mercadante – Secretary
- Bob Thompson – Treasurer

We also welcome Don Tarbert, who has been appointed to fill the open council position for 2026.

A heartfelt thank you goes out to Bob Dudek and Frank McQuillan for their dedication in plowing, shoveling, and salting the church parking lot and sidewalks so our members can arrive safely. They also recharged the front camera for the church. Your hard work is truly appreciated!

We have two after worship fellowship events coming up, and we hope to see many of you there:

- **Souper Bowl Sundae – February 8**
- **Mardi Gras Pancake Lunch – February 15,** leading us into the start of Lent.

Ash Wednesday worship will be held on February 18, 2026.

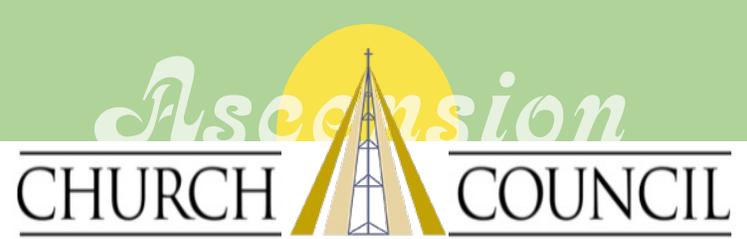
Finally, the rescheduled **Annual Congregational Meeting will take place on February 22, 2026** following worship.

Blessings,

Sharon Giza

Ascension Lutheran Church Council President

(See page 1 for full listing of Council liaisons)



ALC Council Meeting Highlights

Council meeting was held Tues. Jan. 13, 2026

In attendance: Bob S, Bob T, Jeff, Katie, Sharon, Joyce, Pastor, Deb W & Bill W

AED Check: yes, ok

Minutes of Last Meeting were reviewed and approved.

Pastor Report, Office Admin Report, Officer Reports and Committee Reports were presented. Of particular note: Treasurer reports decline in contributions and attendance.

Old Business:

- open council position for 2026 term ending in 2027. Don Tarbert recommended. Motion passed.
- committee reports for January 25, 2026 Bulletin of Reports meeting are due Sunday Jan 18th
- “Souls in Seats” – Bob S presentation will be presented to congregation at 1/25/26 meeting.

New Business:

- New officers for 2026 elected:
Pres: Sharon **VP:** Deb W **Sec:** Katie **Treas:** Bob T
- Committee liaisons determined.
- Special Projects: Need Pew/Seat Upholstery, Parking lot repairs

Important dates 2026:

- January 25 Bulletin of Reports Meeting
- Feb 8 “Souper Bowl Sundae” after worship
- Feb 10 Council Meeting
- Feb 15 Mardi Gras fellowship after church.

Adjournment & Closing Prayer at 8:35pm

Next Council Meeting: Tues Feb. 10, 2026 at 7 pm

WORSHIP ASSISTANT † COMMUNION ASSISTANT † LECTOR

If you are willing to learn and fulfill one of several roles in the vital ministry of worship, know that your giving of time and talent is much needed and appreciated. Consider joining the roster of members who assist at our worship services throughout the year. The time investment is minimal yet the rewards are plentiful!

Please contact Pastor Kobert, a Council member or any of the current Worship Assistants, Communion Assistants, or Lectors whom you see performing these duties on Sundays and special Feasts throughout the year. They will gladly guide you through the process of becoming a member of the “team.”



FEBRUARY

Date	Member/Friend
6	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

Best wishes & many blessings!

BIBLE STUDY AT ASCENSION CHURCH THURSDAYS* at 7:00 pm

Under the guidance of longtime spiritualist and Ascension Church member Rich Mussman, sessions promise to be friendly, interactive, and "just right." Start your new year in meaningful conversation about the "Good Book."

**Sessions are usually held on the first three Thursdays of every month.*



Downey House is Our House . . . Join the Lunch Bunch FEBRUARY 19th

In January twelve Ascension Lunch Bunchers enjoyed the "Bahama Breeze" - although the Pittsburgh breeze (more like wind) outside was pretty chilly with some snow flurries added in for good measure. Those with island shirts on had to wear long sleeves underneath them, but they got into the island spirit anyway. The food and service were good and the camaraderie was great.

On Thursday February 19th, the group will "do lunch" at Downey's House, 6080 Steubenville Pike. It's a short trip no matter what the weather turns out to be, and the food is always great, especially the pepperoni rolls. If you haven't tried them, join us and you won't be sorry! As is our custom, please let Jerry Wessel (412) 787-1213 or George Kasich (412) 726-1645 know by Tuesday February 17th if you plan to attend so that we have sufficient places set up. February always seems to be the longest month of the year, so why not fight the winter shut-in blahs and join us! ~ Jerry Wessel

"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love.

But the greatest of these is love" 1 Corinthians 13:13



Happy Valentine's Day!

Saturday February 14



**Semi-Annual
Congregational
Meeting
Sunday
February 22, 2026**
Following worship

NOTICE:

Due to the SNOWSTORM of 2026 - which started on the weekend of January 24-25 - Ascension's **Semi-Annual Congregational Meeting** which originally was scheduled for Sunday January 25th had to be postponed to **Sunday February 22nd**. Please mark your calendars and plan to attend this important meeting.

**ASH WEDNESDAY
2026**

**February 18th
5:00 pm**

*Service of Holy Communion
with the Imposition of Ashes*

**WORSHIP
ASSISTANTS**

Assisting Minister:

Jeff Williams

Communion Assistant:

Jennifer Burkholder

Lector:

Rich Mussman

Usher, Acolyte: volunteers Color: PURPLE

**Join us at Ascension Church as we enter the
Great Lent 2026!**



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 Younkens, mother of Kathleen Howells – *stage 4 cancer*
- Hogan Moody, friend of Cy & Kathleen Howells – *cancer*
- 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 – *recovering at home!*
- Monica Esposito – Walenchoks' daughter-in-law – *recovery from recent surgery*
- Sharon Snatchko – John's mother – *currently undergoing cancer treatment*
- Deb Whitfield – *recovering from surgery*
- Deb Walenchok – *lung cancer*
- Laura Burkholder – daughter-in-law of Jennifer – *recovering from surgery*

Please notify Pastor or the office of any changes to the status of those on the Prayer List.

*“Stay tuned”
for the schedule of
Holy Week &
Easter services for 2026*

MARDI GRAS PANCAKE LUNCH!!



Please join us for our annual
Mardi Gras Pancake Lunch
Sunday, February 15 after worship.

We hope to see you to there!

Come on **EVERYONE,**

Let's have some **FUN!**



It's **SOUPER SUNDAE** Sunday, February 8th

Join us in the Fellowship Hall following worship for

A "SOUPER Bowl Sundae" Lunch

A variety of delicious Soups & Ice Cream Sundaes
will be featured along with refreshments.



events

Ascension's Youth & Family Committee

Feb 15 - Family Bowling

Mar 15 - "Lucky to be Lutheran" Family Bingo

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

May - (date TBD) Activity Bingo



WHY does

LENT

start so **EARLY**
this year?

Ash Wednesday:
February 18, 2026

Easter Sunday:
April 5, 2026

Why the Dates Change:

Lunar Calendar: The dates of the Lenten and Paschal seasons are set based on the Paschal Full Moon.

Spring Equinox: The dates are tied to the first full moon after the March 21 equinox (the "official" start of Spring).

For 2026, the full moon occurs earlier in the Spring cycle, resulting in an earlier Easter and consequently an earlier start to Lent.

According to the *Old Farmer's Almanac*, Easter is a "movable feast," so it doesn't happen on the same date from year to year. For those Christians who follow the Gregorian calendar, it is always observed on a Sunday between March 22 and April 25. However, Easter can be observed between April 4 and May 8 in the Eastern Orthodox Church due to their adhering to the Julian calendar.

With "Mount Ascension" dominating the foreground, the lot at 1290 Silver Lane was still loaded with snow a week after the big storm hit on Jan. 24-25, 2026.

FEBRUARY 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

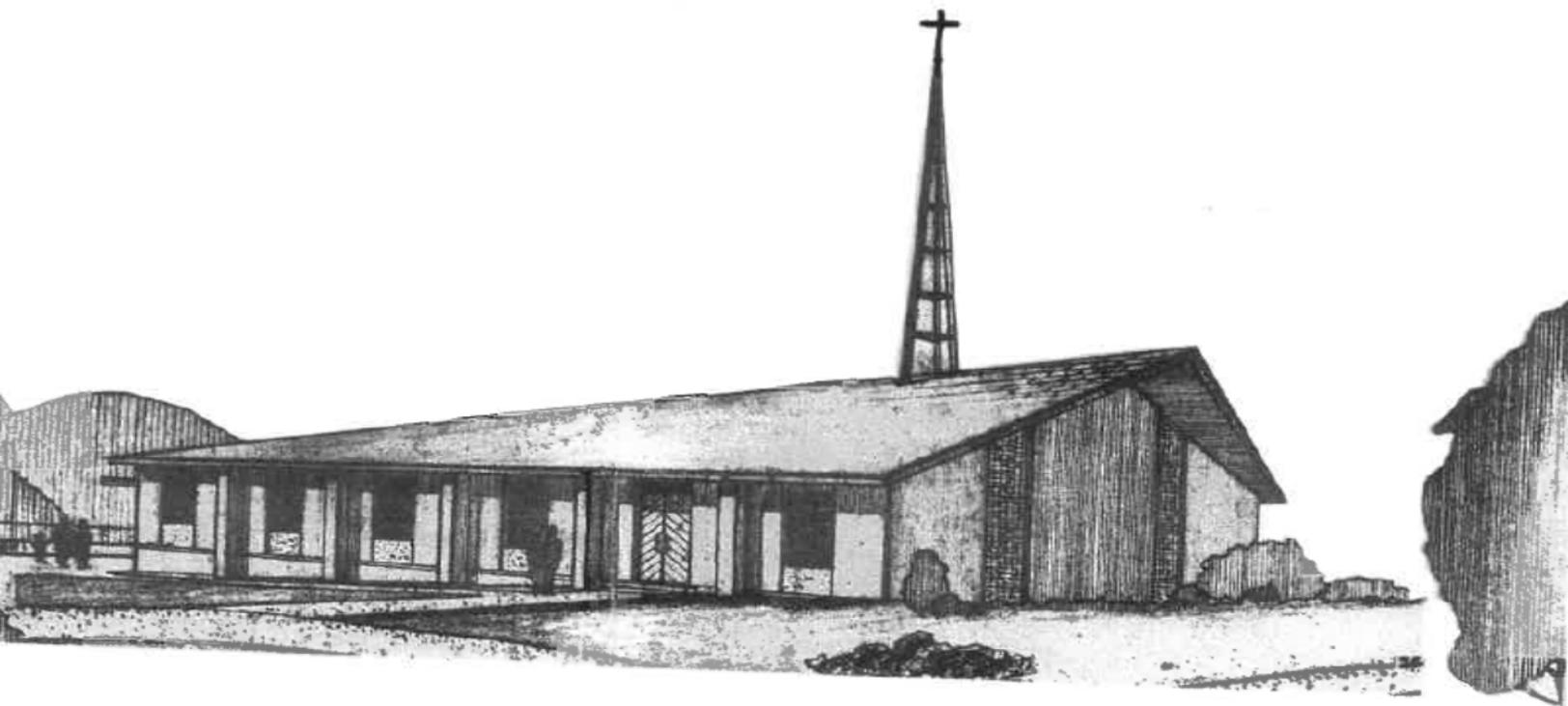
martyr, d. 156

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.*



Contact Us
(412) 859-3711

office@alcpgh.com
mtcalvarycem@alcpgh.com
pastorstpaulssev@gmail.com

Ascension Lutheran Church
1290 Silver Lane
McKees Rocks, PA 15136
(Robinson Township)
Visit us on the web at
www.alcpgh.com

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PLACE
STAMP
HERE

