



Yuletide Edition

December '23/January '24

Ascension on the Mountain



Clergy

The Rt. Rev. Glenda S. Curry,
Bishop of Alabama

The Rt. Rev. Brian N. Prior,
Assisting Bishop

The Rev. John "Jack" T. Alvey, Jr.,
Rector

The Rev. Emily C. Collette,
Associate Rector

Program Staff

Mike Sparks,
Organist & Choir Master

Amanda Austin,
Director of Children's Ministry

Kathy Lounsbury,
Parish Life Coordinator

Callahan Thompson,
Director of Youth Ministry

Rebecca Posey,
AEDS Director

Support Staff

Karyn Watts,
Administrative Assistant

Shannon George,
Communications Director

Paige Reese & Katherine Barrow,
Nursery



BLESSING OF THE ANIMALS

Rector's Letter - 1, 4
Parish Retreat - 2
Financial Summary - 3
Vestry Notes - 3
Annual Giving - 4
Photo Recap - 5
Vestry Nominees - 6
B'days and Anniv. - 7
Upcoming Events - 8

Episcopal Church of the Ascension

1912 Canyon Road

Vestavia Hills, AL 35216

205-822-3480

www.ascensionepiscopal.org

admin@ascensionepiscopal.org



Rector's Letter

Dear Friends,

According to one study, only 8% of people actually keep their New Year's Resolutions. A lot of people resolve to live a healthier life. Some vow not to eat sugar, go easy on the carbs, and hit the gym. Others commit to be a better friend or family member. I've also known a few who resolve to go to church more! I have resolved to lose five pounds by the end of January in hopes the trend will continue throughout the year. I don't want to set the bar too high!

In theological terms, our New Year's resolutions are evidence of a law-based culture. In other words, so much of our self-worth is wrapped up in what we do (or don't do) and in how we measure up to the standard that we or others have set. In a law-based culture, our self-worth is diminished when we don't measure up. Using New Year's Resolutions as the standard, 92% of us are failures.

According to the Christian gospel that I know, ours is a God who invites us to live in a grace-based culture. Our self-worth is wrapped up completely in what Christ has done - for our lives are hid with Christ in God. God turns failure into an invitation to trust more and more the identity God secures for us in Christ - beloved child of God.

continues on page 4



Parish Retreat

at Camp McDowell



Join your parish family at wonderful Camp McDowell for our annual Parish Retreat. Expect a weekend of fun, fellowship, and food (always delicious food with this family), kicking off at 11 am on Saturday and wrapping up after worship on Sunday morning. You can add on a Friday night stay as well if you and your family would like some extra time at camp (no dinner is provided). This annual gathering creates a welcome space for meeting new members and reconnecting with long-time Ascension friends.

LODGING: \$140 per room per night – each room has two double beds and private bathroom with shared living area.

IMPORTANT NOTE! ONLY THE PRIMARY REGISTRANT should note room type. Everyone else should register as "ADDITIONAL LODGER." OTHERWISE, YOU'LL BE CHARGED for a full room for each person!

MEALS: Meals are \$10/ea. for those ages 5 and older. Meals are \$1/ea. for those ages 4 and under. Camp requires a fee of \$1 for outside meals (we are doing potluck on Saturday night).



Everyone is welcome and encouraged to attend. **Financial assistance is available.** Contact the Rev. Jack Alvey with any questions about financial assistance at jack.alvey@ascensionepiscopal.org.

REGISTRATION DEADLINE: January 1, 2024.

Finding God in the Margins

Sunday Adult Forum @ 9:30 a.m.

Winter Series

January 14 - MLK Jr.'s Letter from the Birmingham Jail

Our clergy invite reflections on MLK, Jr.'s letter from the Birmingham Jail

January 21 - Lift up the Vulnerable (LUV) | Audrey Moore

LUV's mission is to empower children & women who are most at-risk for human trafficking

January 28 - Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) | Kelly Burke

CASA's mission is to speak up for abused or neglected children

February 4 - Reflecting on the Holocaust | Kelly Sorrell

Kelly will reflect on her visit to Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland this past summer

Financial Summary

	Actual	Budget	Difference
Pledge Income	\$ 484,219	\$ 453,710	\$ 30,509
Other Income	\$ 110,620	\$ 94,421	\$ 16,199
Total Revenues	\$ 594,839	\$ 548,131	\$ 46,708
Outreach	\$ 43,951	\$ 55,832	\$ (11,881)
Program	\$ 554,223	\$ 525,167	\$ 29,056
Total Disbursements	\$ 598,174	\$ 580,999	\$ 17,175
Net Surplus / (Deficit)	\$ (3,335)	\$ (32,868)	\$ 29,534

Financial Notes

Our October income far exceed budget expectations which leaves us with solid financial footing heading into what have been historically the strongest months of the year. Due to unexpected expenses related to HVAC and repair, our program budget shows a \$29,000+ deficit. We anticipate that this deficit will be accounted for by additional gifts that were not anticipated at the beginning of the year. As far as you are able, help us finish the year strong by fulfilling your financial commitment to the parish. Thank you for your support!

Vestry Notes

In response to the most recent conversation regarding loans and investments (see the Fall 2023 Edition of the newsletter), the Vestry approved the creation of a Finance Committee. The committee is comprised of three ex-officio members, The Rev. Jack Alvey, Rector, Len Skelton, Treasurer, and Martin Hoerner, Finance Chair plus three at-large members who are Colleen Baird, Meredith Lees, and Vaughn Sparks. The committee will meet quarterly and advise the Vestry on investment and loan re-payment strategy.

During the November meeting, the Vestry voted to establish the John Wilson Memorial Fund which will be used to support our feeding programs such as The Abbey and First Light Shelter. In addition, the Vestry voted to name the kitchen in John's honor. A formal naming ceremony will be scheduled.

The Vestry named Tom Ogiba to replace Susan Phillips as the new chairperson for the Safety & Security Committee. One immediate change concerned securing the Christian Education wing during Sunday School and Worship. To make this happen, a protocol needed to be established to keep the downstairs AEDS door locked which had been unlocked for the elevator. Ushers, Greeters, and Vestry members have been made aware of the change and know how to unlock the door should someone need to use the elevator.



"ASK THE CLERGY" PODCAST

A podcast featuring Jack and Emily where they wrestle with YOUR questions about the church, the Bible, and theology!

Submit your questions to Emily.Collette@ascensionepiscopal.org.

Annual Giving Campaign

We have received **102 pledge cards totaling \$614,650**. In order for the Vestry to balance a budget which reflects our current ministry needs, **we hope to receive pledges totaling at least \$650,000**. We estimate that we will **need about 12 more pledge cards** to reach this goal. If you have not made your pledge yet, it's not too late! You can do so online or fill out a card in the parish office. *If circumstances prevent you from making a pledge again this year, please let the parish office know so the Vestry can plan accordingly.*

The success of the annual giving campaign is a good indicator of the health of this parish. To date, we've received **13 new pledge cards** which represent a growing congregation. In addition, **39 of our previous pledgers have increased their pledge** for the 2024 program year. Thank you for your financial support which strengthens our commitment to make Christ know by our love for all.

Rector's Letter continued...

Most of the articles I have read regarding New Year's Resolutions encourage readers to make resolutions that are realistic and attainable. While this approach might satisfy the ego and help you reach your goals, I invite you to make resolutions that will encourage you to return to God for help and encouragement. I invite you to see the possibility of failure as an opportunity to draw closer to God.

I am reminded of a story where a nun became frustrated with her ability to keep quiet and discern the presence of God in prayer. She confessed that she was a failure. "In twenty minutes, I've had ten-thousand thoughts!" Her mentor, Father Thomas Keating, responded, "How lovely, ten thousand opportunities to return to God."

Verna Dozier, 20th century lay theologian who has been canonized in the Episcopal Church, says it like this, "Jesus preached repentance. The Church settled for moralism." While a scary word for some, Jesus' call to repentance (meaning 'to return') is actually an invitation to leave a law-based culture in order to experience the grace-based culture given in a life lived in Jesus Christ.

Moralism tends to call one to justify the self against a certain standard set by God, the church, or culture. "How can I make myself better?" is the why behind moralism. While moralism might result in the improvement of self, it ultimately calls us to think about the self more which can blind us to the needs of others.

Repentance, however, turns our attention to Christ – the One through whom we are justified. "How can God make me well again?" is the why behind repentance. The answer starts with baptism. In baptism, we receive the name given at Jesus' baptism – beloved. In Christ, we can stop proving ourselves or our worth to anyone. Repentance is a call back to our baptismal state where we commit to make God the center of our devotion – not ourselves.

In my experience, any opportunity to return to God is an occasion to grow in God's love. When I grow in God's love, I also grow in love for myself and for my neighbor. It is God's love that gives me the strength to take better care of myself, to be kinder to friends and family – especially the ones who aggravate me the most! God's love is what is capable of producing the goals I set for myself. Ultimately, God's love calls me to chase after what God desires instead of what I want.

When you look back at 2024, my prayer is that you are encouraged and rooted in a God who creates for us a grace-based culture in Jesus Christ – the perfecter and standard of a faith governed by unconditional love. Regardless of how well you keep your resolutions, I pray that you see yourself more clearly as one made worthy of love through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**"Jesus preached repentance.
The Church settled for moralism."
Verna Dozier**

Faithfully,
Jack+

Oct/Nov 2023 photo recap

Holy Hike



EYC Outreach



All Hallows Eve Carnival



Club 45 Lunch



Pier 60 Halloween Party



Advent Wreaths



Cursillo Ultreya



Talent Show



Baptism of Lucy Joy Brisendine



Men's Retreat



Parish Workday



Trivia Night



Commitment Sunday Brunch Chefs



Vestry Nominees Class of 2026

Kelly Gould



- Married to Alex and has two children, Welles and Hagen
- Stewardship Committee Member
- Pier 34 (30s/40s Peer Group) Co-Chair
- AEDS Assistant Director

Ann Nelson



- Married to Jason and has two sons, Gabe and Andrew
- Clerk of the Vestry
- Food Truck Festival Committee
- Youth & Children's Committee
- Former Children's Formation Director at Ascension

Caralyn McDaniel



- Married to John and has three children: Emma, Ben, and Betsy
- Choir Member
- Outreach Committee
- Youth & Children's Committee
- First Light Coordinator
- EfM Student

Elizabeth Tanner



- Has three grown children: Laurie, Jonathan, and Christopher
- Former Senior and Junior Warden of the Vestry
- Lay Pastoral Care Team Chair
- Choir Member
- EfM Student

Annual Parish Meeting

December 3rd at 9:30 a.m.

Meets in the Nave

Vestry Nominations

The Vestry is an elected board of 12 confirmed communicants in good standing who represent and make decisions on behalf of the congregation.

Each Vestry person serves a three-year term. Every year, four new Vestry members are elected to replace outgoing members. This year our outgoing members are Anna Colvin, Dana Porter, Leslie Sharbel, and Kelly Sorrell. Please be sure to thank them for their dedication and service to the parish.

Four parishioners have been nominated to fill four positions. The nominees include Kelly Gould, Caralyn McDaniel, Ann Nelson, and Elizabeth Tanner.

Elections will take place at our Annual Meeting which will be held in the Nave on Sunday, December 3rd at 9:30 am. Additional nominations may be made during the meeting.

In addition, the parish will elect delegates to represent Ascension at the Annual Diocesan Convention. The 2024 convention will be held in Montgomery February 8-10.

BIRTHDAYS & *Anniversaries*

December Birthdays

2 Marguerite Handlin	18 Eloise Ennis
2 Pep Peppenhorst	19 Jan Ennis
2 Whit Whitfield	19 Jamie Alvey
3 Arnold Harrington	19 Susan Phillips
3 Sarah Lagrone	19 Ryan Posey
3 Marcia Poarch	21 Ben Chastain
4 Peggy West	21 Hunter Whitfield
4 David Brooks	22 Leah Fair
4 Bartlee Linton	22 John Alvey
6 Jerry James	23 Scott Duke
7 Christy Smith	23 Alex Wright
9 Betsy Campbell	27 Amanda Orr
9 Gia Searcy	27 Abigail Morrow
10 Glenn Banks, IV	27 Aubrey Loftis
10 Kevin Houston	27 Natalie Houston
11 Loring Jones, III	28 Maribeth Sauer
15 Rick Phillips	28 Charlie Ireland
17 Sharon Stratton	30 Len Skelton
17 Laura Tucker	30 Nancy Sharp
18 Lyn Emanuel	30 Chuck Conyers

December Anniversaries

11 Alison and Tommy Ritter
 20 Sharon and Sam Linton
 22 Ann and Bob Carr
 24 Alex and Stan Roberts
 26 Harriet and Chuck Conyers
 28 Jan and Massey Gentry

January Birthdays

3 Charley Grimes	12 Brooke Banks
3 Meredith Graham	12 Tim Burke
5 Spencer Bringman	14 Mary Louise Hill
5 Sara Wuska	15 Rhodes Parker
7 Ann Nelson	16 Rob Smith
7 Roger Jones	18 Billye Ann Chase
8 Seth Knowles	18 Josh Bennett
8 Kathy Whatley	19 Meredith Lees
9 Amanda Austin	19 Elizabeth Austin
9 Mac Knowles	23 Dick Lounsbury
10 John Clark	24 Pete Hooper
10 Eva Byrum	24 Aurthur Porter
10 Jack Alvey	26 Nancy Caltrider
11 Abigail Jowers	26 Brent Dillon
11 Laurie Tanner	30 Bryan McGuffey
12 Carolyn Eike	30 Lilly Poehler
12 Charles Colvin	31 Brittain Poehler

January Anniversaries

3 Keil and Roger Etherington
 7 Roxanne and Clay Coleman
 14 Katie and Zander Carrie
 28 Anne and Matt Brisendine

Anniversary Prayer

O God, You have so consecrated the covenant of marriage that in it is represented the spiritual unity between Christ and his Church; Send therefore your blessing upon these your servants, that they may so love, honor, and cherish each other in faithfulness and patience, in wisdom and true godliness, that their home may be a haven of blessing and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Birthday Prayer

O God, our times are in your hand: Look with favor, we pray, on your servants as they begin another year. Grant that they may grow in wisdom and grace, and strengthen their trust in your goodness all the days of their life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



Episcopal Church of the Ascension
1912 Canyon Road
Vestavia Hills, AL 35216-1799

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Sunday | December 24th



8:00 am - Advent IV | Holy Eucharist, Rite I
3:00 pm - Christmas Eve | Holy Eucharist, Rite II
(nursery, congregation singing)
5:30 pm - Choral Prelude
6:00 pm - Christmas Eve | Holy Eucharist, Rite II
(no nursery, full choir)
No services on Christmas Day

Service Times

8 am and 10:30 am, Sunday
Noon, Wednesday

u p c o m i n g e v e n t s



Annual Meeting | Bake Sale | Sunday Lunch
December 3



Advent Wellness Series
December 3, 10, 17 (4pm)



Pier 23 (20s/30s group)
Christmas Party
December 3



Pier 34 (30s/40s group)
Xmas Shindig
December 8



St. Nicholas Day
December 9



Advent Lessons & Carols
December 10



Pier 60 (60+ group)
Sweats & Treats Christmas Party
December 13



Pier 45 (40s/50s group)
Christmas Party
December 15



Christmas Pageant
December 17



EYC Christmas Party
December 17



Christmas Eve Worship
December 24 (3&6)



Parish Retreat
January 6-7



Newcomer Coffee
January 21

TO REGISTER, RSVP, OR LEARN MORE ABOUT THESE EVENTS, PLEASE VIEW THEM IN REALM
OR VISIT THE ANNOUNCEMENTS SECTION ON OUR WEBSITE