

**Church of the Ascension
Vestry Election 2023 Candidate Questionnaire**

Name (as you wish it to appear on vestry ballot):

Isabel Spencer

Member of Ascension since (year):

1985



Occupation (including title and company):

Retired newspaper editor

Please list up to **five** of your activities at Ascension that you feel would be useful to you in your service as a vestry member:

Vestry member

Ascension Outreach volunteer

Buildings and Grounds chair

Altar Guild

Please list up to **five** of your activities elsewhere in the Episcopal Church or in the community that you feel would be useful to you in your service as a vestry member:

Co-op and condo boards chair

College and school fund-raising

Previous service as warden (in Philadelphia)

Please answer the following three questions. The total of your answers should be no more than 100 words.

1. What drew you to Ascension?

In a word: proximity. Then the music, intelligent sermons, and beautiful surrounds.

2. What do you see as Ascension's greatest strengths?

The same things that drew me here: music, the intelligent sermons and the inspiring surroundings. In word: Worship.

3. What is your vision for Ascension in the next five years?

I see us striving to rebuild our beloved community, while working to build community in the larger worlds around us. It starts with fellowship and purpose among ourselves, inspiring us to go outward as a group or in other groups.

4. What skills, experiences, and/or talents will you bring to the work of the vestry?

Knowledge of where we as a church have come from, and hopefully an open-minded attitude about where we need to go. Skills and talents: not so much. I should have majored in construction management.

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Name (as you wish it to appear on vestry ballot):

Kyle Church Cheseborough

Member of Ascension since (year):

2015

Occupation (including title and company):

Associate for Development & Membership, Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR)



Please list up to **five** of your activities at Ascension that you feel would be useful to you in your service as a vestry member:

1. **Lector;**
2. **Greeter;**
3. **Usher;**
4. **Welcome Committee;**
5. **Personnel Committee.**

Please list up to **five** of your activities elsewhere in the Episcopal Church or in the community that you feel would be useful to you in your service as a vestry member:

1. **Professional choral artist and soloist;**
2. **Facilitator of the search committee for incumbent Organist and Master of Choristers, Grace Church New York;**
3. **Manage membership recruitment and retention for ICCR;**
4. **Formerly an accounts receivable manager, responsible for all corporate and membership billing and bank deposits for ICCR.**

Please answer the following three questions. The total of your answers should be no more than 100 words.

1. What drew you to Ascension?

We wanted a church home that was comforting and warm, where words from the pulpit are as ennobling as the music played and sung. Ascension welcomes our family and supports our union.

2. What do you see as Ascension's greatest strengths?

Ascension Outreach is a shining beacon of hope; together with our clergy, Welcome Committee, and Altar Guild, our parish nourishes bodies and souls outside and in the church.

3. What is your vision for Ascension in the next five years?

Ascension will not only preserve and protect its resources but bravely seek new pathways for interfaith listening, learning, dialogue, and cooperation.

4. What skills, experiences, and/or talents will you bring to the work of the vestry?
I am an active listener and am incredibly thoughtful about making decisions of great importance. I work well in concert with others, striving always to be sensitive to their feelings. My work as a musician taught me many of the skills necessary to work effectively with others and has served me well throughout my professional life. When it

comes to stewardship, I'm not afraid of making direct calls to you! In a prior annual event fundraising role, an Executive Director I worked for strenuously avoided cold-calling her friends for corporate donations. Every year she would hand me her list saying, "here, you do it." And I did it very well, thank you.

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Name (as you wish it to appear on vestry ballot):

Ned Fitch

Member of Ascension since (year):

1997

Occupation (including title and company):

Corporate Human Resources Director, Burlington Stores

Please list up to **five** of your activities at Ascension that you feel would be useful to you in your service as a vestry member:

Current:

Choir member

Michael D. Fender/Ascension Outreach Food Pantry volunteer

Personnel Committee

Former:

Vestry member

Rector Search Committee

Altar Guild and Ushers Guild

Discernment Committee Convener

Chalice Bearer and Lay Eucharistic Visitor

Evangelism (Spiritual Direction) Chair

Stewardship Committee

Hospitality Committee

Lay Reader

Please list up to **five** of your activities elsewhere in the Episcopal Church or in the community that you feel would be useful to you in your service as a vestry member:

MasterVoices (formerly Collegiate Chorale) member / Singers Council Governing Board member

New York Road Runners Team for Kids volunteer and fundraiser

Randolph-Macon College Alumni LGBTQ+ Advisor Board member

Please answer the following three questions. The total of your answers should be no more than 100 words.

1. What drew you to Ascension?

There are many Episcopal churches in New York City and while "church shopping" in 1997 I found myself coming back to Ascension more frequently than other churches on my "list." The initial draw was the beauty of the service; the liturgy, preaching and music - in a beautiful church space. As I grew to know Ascension more, it was the people that kept me coming back; the warmth of the community, the genuine care and interest of the clergy, and the ability to become involved quickly. Ascension is a big church in a very big city but has the feel of a "hometown" church.

2. What do you see as Ascension's greatest strengths?

The people of Ascension are her greatest strengths. We have a deeply committed and caring congregation (clergy, staff, wardens/vestry, and parishioners) that, most importantly, care for each other and our community.

In addition, we are blessed with beautiful buildings, intellectual, spiritual, and caring clergy, and a very rich music heritage.

3. What is your vision for Ascension in the next five years?

We must secure Ascension's future through smart financial gains to continue to be a place where people come to deepen their relationship with God. Our programs, outreach to the community and care for our parishioners must continue to be top priorities.

4. What skills, experiences, and/or talents will you bring to the work of the vestry?

An extensive background in Human Resources within the retail field (which includes experience in Marketing), my involvement in and great appreciation for choral music, and my volunteer activities.

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Name (as you wish it to appear on vestry ballot):

Michael Surabian

Member of Ascension since (year):

2008

Occupation (including title and company):

Current: Managing Director, Legend PR. Former: Co-Artistic Director, Phoenix Theatre Ensemble, NYC; member of resident acting company at Jean Cocteau Repertory Theatre, NYC.



Please list up to **five** of your activities at Ascension that you feel would be useful to you in your service as a vestry member:

- ***Member of the acolyte guild (torchbearer, chalice bearer, crucifer and server) since 2009***
- ***Hospitality Committee member***
- ***Homeless shelter volunteer***
- ***Lector***
- ***Understudy for Jesus***

Please list up to **five** of your activities elsewhere in the Episcopal Church or in the community that you feel would be useful to you in your service as a vestry member:

- ***Former Board of Directors and current Advisory Board member for Food Education Fund, supporting NYC's only culinary high school, School of Food and Finance***

Please answer the following three questions. The total of your answers should be no more than 100 words.

1. ***What drew you to Ascension? Transparently, I was speed dating a number of churches around the time I first walked into Ascension. After that first “date,” all other candidates fell away. The immediate impact of the music, the ministry and the membership – all powerful and welcoming – is what made me know this was a perfect match. It is all those things, and more, that make Ascension home for me.***
2. ***What do you see as Ascension’s greatest strengths? I feel Ascension has an unparalleled legacy of a diverse congregation + leadership, transcendent music and strong community outreach and activism. The leadership’s commitment to those engaged with Ascension for near and far (esp. during the pandemic) illustrates the deep connection between the congregation and clergy. And the diverse community also brings to life the myriad ways people celebrate and worship God in their own personal way, which provides more opportunity to grow. All of that, combined with a vibrant and contemporary liturgy, makes Ascension, for me, one of the hidden gems of NYC’s religious community.***

3. ***What is your vision for Ascension in the next five years?***

As Ascension nears its bicentennial, I believe the best of what Ascension offers can be elevated, leveraged for fundraising and shared more broadly with those who know us, and, more importantly, those who do not. I also believe there is a younger untapped

population in NYC that values spirituality in an environment of inclusiveness, and one that promotes loving activism and respectful resistance – which I see as foundational to Ascension.

4. What skills, experiences, and/or talents will you bring to the work of the vestry?
 - *My experience in marketing has helped me develop a very particular set of skills, skills I have acquired over a very long career, including traditional & social media, community relations, events & activations and partnerships.*
 - *My work on various boards and in the non-profit sector have given me experience in fundraising and managing robust budgets.*
 - *My experience in the arts has nourished my creative side and have always relished being the one in the room that thinks outside the box or pushes the envelope (always respectfully, of course).*
 - *All of these have also informed strong writing and communication skills.*