THE CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION

IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

FIFTH AVENUE AT TENTH STREET

A PARISH OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN THE DIOCESE OF NEW YORK



Annual Report for 2020

Annual Meeting of 31 January 2021

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2020

Given at the Annual Meeting of The Church of the Ascension
Fifth Avenue at Tenth Street, New York City
Parish House (Offices and Mailing Address): 12 West 11th Street, New York, New York 10011
Telephone: 212-254-8620 • Internet Address: www.ascensionnyc.org

January 31, 2021

CLERGY AND STAFF

The Rt. Rev. Andrew Dietsche	Bishop of New York
The Rev. Elizabeth G. Maxwell	Rector
The Rev. Edwin Chinery	Associate Rector
The Rev. Posey Krakowsky	Priest Associate
The Rev. Meredith Ward	Priest Associate
Dr. Dennis Keene	Organist and Choirmaster
Br. Andrew Jones, OSF	Parish Administrator
Laurie Ross	Parish Bookkeeper
Lenford Bowman	Sexton
Ravi Gayadin	Assistant Sexton
William Gordon	Assistant Sexton
Carolyn Braden	Choir Assistant
G. Jan Jones	Choir Librarian
Sandra Bowman	Nursery Caregiver

2020 VESTRY MEMBERS

Maurice Seaton, Warden
Isabel Spencer, Warden
Mary Gaillard, Treasurer
Micah Trippe, Clerk

Class of 2021	**Class of 2022**	**Class of 2023**
Mary Gaillard	Barbara M. Burns	Kyle Church Cheseborough
Vin Knight	Janet Fisher	Peter Clark
David Lehmann	Rusty Moore	Tom Rice
John Thompson	Madonna Stack-Barker	Jill Tildesley

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2021 Annual Meeting Agenda

The Annual Meeting is convened immediately following the 11:00 service. Ballots were distributed electronically on the Sunday prior to the annual meeting, January 24, and polls remained open until 9 a.m. Wednesday, January 27. Run-off ballots were not required. Results of the election will be announced at the Annual Meeting.

Opening Collect

Call to Order

Appointment of Secretary

Minutes of meeting of January 26, 2020

Treasurer's Report for 2020 and 2021 Budget

Rector and Warden's Remarks

Questions and Answers

Planned Giving- Liz Hill

The year in images

Small Group Conversations and Report back

Necrology

Announcements

Announcement of Election results

Benediction:

> O God of unbounded grace and abundance, we thank you for the Church of the Ascension, our spiritual home and an island of light and beauty in the vibrant life of this city. You have drawn countless worshippers to this place, known and unknows, to love and to serve you. Be with us now as we seek to renew our parish through the year ahead. May your spirit of benevolence and generosity inspire us to be your faithful people in our day, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*.

Adjournment

Minutes of the 2020 Annual Meeting

of the Church of the Ascension

Held on Sunday, January 26, 2020

The Annual Meeting Order was first called to order following the 9 am service and those present voted. The meeting was then suspended until the end of the 11 am service. It was reconvened immediately following the 11 AM service to allow those in attendance to vote. Ballots were distributed in the Narthex. Polls remained opened until 2 PM.

Opening Collect and Call to Order: Immediately following the 11 AM service, Mother Liz called the meeting to order with an opening collect at 12:50 PM.

Lunch was set out in the Parish Hall, when the meeting began. More than 60 parishioners were in attendance.

Appointment of Secretary: Mother Liz asked for a motion to appoint David Lehmann as secretary and was unanimously approved.

She then turned the meeting over to Mary Gaillard, Treasurer, and John Grimes, Chair of the Finance Committee.

Report of Treasurer and Finance Committee: John Grimes, Chair of the Finance Committee, and Mary Gaillard, Treasurer, gave their report, the details of which can be found on 11-14. They noted the significant change with the illness and ensuing retirement of Ascension's bookkeeper of 30 years, Vince Amodei. John praised Vince's dedication and the exceptional work of Mary Gaillard and Madonna Stack-Barker who worked with temporary bookkeepers while Vince was on medical leave and then again since his retirement. The hiring of a new bookkeeper is expected this spring. They referred to the results of the Capital Campaign (page 22), the deficit (page 11) and Endowment Funds (page 14). They called for unrestricted bequests to Ascension, which do not require challenges to purpose of restricted bequests.

A question was asked: Will the growth in the market help our endowments/portfolio? The answer by Mary was "Yes," but that the income from the endowment funds that we draw down is based on a long-term, quarterly average of the funds, which tempers the impact of large increases and large decreases.

Mother Liz expressed her gratitude for the Finance Committee's hard work and dedication and welcomed anyone with expertise in finance to join the Committee.

Report of Nominating Committee: Isabel announced the names of the following candidates running for Vestry: Peter Clark and Jill Tildesly are running for re-election . Kyle Cheseborough and Tom Rice are running to fill the two vacant seats left by the departure of J. Shepard Skiff and Phillips Smith. Warden: Maurice Seaton was re-elected for a second term of two years.

Wardens Report: (Page 19): Isabel thanked Mother Posey and the needlecraft guild for the exceptional green vestments and for their many contributions to the life of the Parish. Isabel called on us to respect our historic community and asked that our "past inform the future." Maurice

referred to Mother Liz's sermon with regard to 'location, location, location." He called on us to find new ways to leverage our location. For example, use our garden for evangelism and visibility to the community. He praised Father Ed for his efforts of outreach to the community, using the Food Pantry and Resistance Cinema for examples. He challenged us to consider our vision for God's presence in our community. He acknowledged that change often brings out the best in us. He asked us to "be not afraid, to find the light." And to remember the heritage expressed in *The Unknown Worshipper* (1964): "Church of the Ascension has always stood for something."

At the end of the Wardens' remarks, Mother Liz declared the polls closed at 2 PM.

Rector's Remarks:
Mother Liz referred to her sermon as the bulk of her report. She called on us to let her know if we felt a nudge by the Holy Spirit to get more involved in the life of Ascension. She issued a challenge to each of us: bring a guest!

A question was asked: How can we help you? She replied "Pray and show up."

Announcement of Election Results: Mother Liz announced the election results as follows: Kyle Cheseborough, Peter Clark, Tom Rice and Jill Tildsley have been elected to Vestry and will be commissioned next Sunday.

Questions and Answers: No questions were forthcoming from the floor.

Story Telling: (*How have you felt God's call both here at Ascension and outside*?) Mother Liz asked each of the tables to talk amongst themselves for 10 minutes discussing this topic. Discussions were halted at 1:30 PM at which time Mother Liz asked each table what main point resulted from their particular discussion? The resounding answer: keep the doors open, especially from noon to 3 PM on Saturdays.

Also requested was a book group focusing on "The Unknown Worshipper" and a summary of Vestry meetings in the bulletin.

Necrology: Mother Liz asked all in attendance to bow our heads in prayer remembering all those parishioners who passed away in 2020.

***Announcements*:** There were no further announcements. Mother Liz thanked Phillips Smith and J. Shepard Skiff for their service on the Vestry.
:
Benediction: Mother Liz led all present in the Benediction found on the fifth page of the Annual Report.

Adjournment: Mother Liz asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was moved by Isabel Spencer, seconded by Tom Rice and unanimously approved.

After a closing prayer, the meeting was adjourned at 2:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted, David Lehmann, Secretary

Parish Statistics

As of 31 December 2020

In this most unusual year, it is remarkable to me that our total attendance is only 800 less than in 2019, and more than 1000 greater than the year before that. This is especially striking because we had only one service each Sunday after March 22 (instead of three), and were not able to have any large weddings, funerals or other special services. Nor were we able to prepare and present anyone for confirmation, although there are people in our community who are ready to make that commitment. Easter attendance was much lower than usual (though still much higher than on ordinary Sunday), perhaps reflecting that some of the people who typically attend only on Easter had trouble finding us online.

I think the numbers testify to the importance of worship to our congregation, and the surprising intimacy, prayerfulness and sustenance many of us found on Zoom. We have not kept track of the number of views for our weekly meditations, so they are not reflected here.

A number of new people have joined us this year from all over the country and the world. We have not reflected them in any membership statistics. it remains to be discerned how they will continue to be part of our community when it is possible to gather in person again.

Attendance at all services:	**9,274**
Sundays:	5,031
Weekdays:	3,058
In person:	1,663
Online:	7,611
Easter Day (not including Vigil):	174

Services conducted	
Sunday Eucharists:	30
Weekday Eucharists:	47
Sunday Ante-communion:	41
Weekday Daily Office:	211
Private Eucharists:	1
Marriages:	1
Burials/ Memorials:	1
Baptisms:	2

Baptisms and Confirmations	
Children (under age 16) baptized:	2
Adults baptized	0
Adults confirmed, received or reaffirmed:	0

Baptisms: **2**

Ila Elizabeth Neumann
Mais Alqazeer Stewart

Confirmed	**0**
Received	**0**
Burials Robert J. Sands	**1**
Transfers In	**0**
Transfers Out Phillips & Ann Smith John R., Sarah H., & Tuck R. Richardson	**5**
Marriage Andrew Jones and Jordan Scoggins	**1**

Baptized Members

Baptized persons on Record, 31 December 2019:	197
Added through baptism in 2018:	2
Added through Confirmation, Reception or Renewal of Vows:	0
Added through Transfer:	0
Lost by Death:	0
Lost by Transfer Out:	5
Total Baptized Members, 31 December 2019:	194

Baptisms and Confirmations

Children (under age 16) baptized:	2
Adults baptized	0
Adults confirmed, received or reaffirmed:	0

Rector's Report

2020 began like many other recent years at Ascension- with gratitude for our life together and a sense of excitement about what we might be able to do next, by God's grace.

In the early months of the year we enjoyed a Christmas 12th night celebration (on the 10th night) with stilt walkers, face painters, roving musicians, food and revelry. Our worship was spirited, beautiful and thought-provoking. We celebrated both baptisms and a memorial service. We shared meals together as both of our relatively new groups- 20's/30's and People Who Lunch- continued with gusto. We pondered the possibilities and challenges presented by a possible expansion of La Petite Ecole, the French pre-school that shares space on the rectory ground floor. Our Reparations Committee did some very exciting work on our parish history with regard to slavery, its economic impact and the Civil War, also attending the Diocesan Apology Retreat and sponsoring a parish forum with Dr. Cynthia Copeland, a public historian who is co-chair of the diocesan Reparations Committee.

As I look back at this time last year, I especially note that one of our themes at the annual meeting was "location, location, location"- how we are called to minister in our neighborhood, and what particular opportunities are offered by our particular place here on 5th Ave. and 10th St. The conversation was lively (it emerged in part from the vestry's mutual ministry review the previous year), and there was lots of excitement about exploring this further.

As Lent began, we offered ashes to go, and geared up for House Eucharists and Lent Madness. On March 8 our dear Meredith Ward was ordained to the diaconate at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, a joyful celebration with at least 20 Ascension parishioners in attendance. She served as deacon at our 11 am service the following day.

That week, everything changed.

There had been information about the spread of a dangerous virus circulating for several weeks. We had made liturgical changes; hugs and handshakes at the peace had been replaced by elbow bumps and solemn bows; we limited intinction from the common cup. We listened to counsel from our bishops and clergy colleagues, and also watched the responses of the NYC public schools and other institutions. Early in that week, it seemed serious but manageable. On Thursday, I wrote a letter to the parish saying that we would have services on March 15, but not share the common cup. But by Friday, it was clear to me that we could not gather safely, and I made the decision to close the church. Our public worship, our opening for public meetings and our tenants, and onsite office work were all suspended. I thought it would be for a few weeks at most.

That Saturday Fr. Ed and I recorded a short service of prayer and meditation for the parish Facebook page, and encouraged everyone to watch worship online at our New York Cathedral and the National Cathedral. That week, the clergy, Dr. Keene and others spent countless hours and conversations figuring out how the Ascension community could gather for worship online, and our Zoom services began on March 22.

Those were difficult days. New York City soon became the national epicenter of the virus, and our days and nights were punctuated with the sound of sirens and the news that hospitals were pressed beyond their capacity by the needs of very sick patients. The city was shut down, and most of us went out only when we had to- a necessity that was not equally shared by all New Yorkers. We worried and mourned; we prayed. In the newly quiet, we sometimes heard unaccustomed bird songs.

We began daily Evening Prayer on zoom, which became an anchor for many of us. We soon realized that we would need to figure out how to observe Holy Week and Easter online. With creativity, skill, love and much grace, we made it happen.

As I reflect on those days, I particularly want to thank several people who stepped forward to help envision and create powerful and prayerful liturgy. First among them is surely John Thompson, who learned to host our Zoom services, discovered other possibilities of the medium and has faithfully shepherded us with his wizardry every Sunday during the pandemic. Starting with the immensely complicated liturgies of Holy Week, my clergy colleagues, Fr. Ed and Mtr. Posey, have preached and prayed and helped imagine how our services and programs could be newly authentic

in this time of pandemic and Zoom. To our great fortune, Mtr. Meredith Ward joined us, first as deacon and eventually as priest associate, as she needed a place to exercise her new ordained ministry. Dr. Keene experimented with a number of different ways to help us sing and keep our musical tradition vibrant. Choir member Hai-Ting Chinn learned how to mix together a recording of 4 voices singing separately so that we had a quartet leading our services. Our readers became comfortable with Zoom as well. All of you helped nourish our community and keep us together in an essential way. Thank you.

Our church business also pivoted in the spring. Vestry and other meetings were held on Zoom. Fr. Ed divided the parish list, and established a vestry calling tree designed to keep in touch with every parishioner. Our meetings included check-ins about how we were faring during the pandemic. Most of our staff worked from home as they were able. Only our sexton, Len Bowman, and I were in the church building regularly, because we live on site. With the help of some valiant, masked volunteers, Fr. Ed kept our pantry program going, serving increasing numbers of our hungry neighbors. It was a priority for us to keep our staff employed, and thanks in substantial part of the PPP loan we received, we were able to do so. Treasurer Mary Gaillard worked countless hours, battling bureaucracy, to apply for the PPP, for which I am deeply grateful.

Some in our Ascension community have had Covid, and many have had sick family members or friends, and experienced the death of loved ones. However, we have not lost anyone in our parish to the disease, and I am both profoundly thankful and aware of the privilege that this indicates. It became clear as the pandemic unfolded that Black, brown and lower income people were disproportionately getting sick and dying. The reasons are manifold: they hold a high number of "essential worker" jobs that don't allow them to stay home but don't provide adequate protective equipment; they experience discrimination in health care; they often live in conditions that make physical distancing difficult, and more. Covid-19 exposed the racism and economic disparity in our country anew.

And then, on Memorial Day, a Black man named George Floyd was killed by a police officer in Minneapolis, while handcuffed and lying facedown on the sidewalk. The murder was filmed on video and it went viral. The whole country exploded in anger, grief and protest, some of which was met with harsh response by police even as we also searched our souls.

This other pandemic- the violent racism which is this country's original and besetting sin- became the second primary hallmark of 2020.

Many at Ascension who would normally have joined the protests felt constrained because of Covid. Some of us attended carefully selected actions, wearing lots of protective gear. We gathered together to talk about what we as a congregation need to do in response to the killing of George Floyd (and Breonna Taylor and many, many others). We tried to educate ourselves, we contacted our elected officials, we prayed. Mtr. Posey made a Black Lives Matter banner, which hangs proudly over the doors to the church. Location again came into play, for our situation between Union Square and Washington Square meant that protests went by the church almost every day for many weeks. We worked with our neighbors across the park at Judson Church to see how we could support those protesting and offering mutual aid.

Since June, an Ascension racial justice group has met every two weeks or so at Ascension. Many of us also attended online retreats and conferences on racial justice offered by the Diocese and others. We joined other parishes in reading Ibram X. Kendi's *How to be an Anti-Racist*. We worked through a special issue of Vanity Fair on Breonna Taylor, racism and the protests. We explored our own personal and family stories around race. Janet Fisher led us in a consideration of the work of artist Howardena Pindell. Most recently we have been looking at the history of the Episcopal Church around racism and racial justice, both nationally and here at Ascension.

The vestry has committed to looking at racial equity investing for our portfolio and I have been involved in discussion with some other parishes about how we can support minority owned vendors. As it is clear that over the course of our history Ascension has benefited economically from slavery and its aftermaths, we know that we have work to do to repair and make amends as best we can. The work is both spiritual and practical, and will no doubt last our lifetimes and beyond. It is going on around our Diocese, and around the country as well as here at Ascension. We must reckon with our history, discern and do our part.

As our new President said in his inaugural address, quoting Abraham Lincoln, "my soul is in it."

This brings me to the other defining issue of this year: the political climate, a bitterly divided nation and an election rife with accusations of fraud and fake news. We spent a lot of time, especially this fall, in sermons and forums and other conversations discussing how we can both stand for justice and treat those whose views we find abhorrent with dignity and care. For me, discerning how to speak about values I hold essential while not being partisan, being clear where I stand while extending a welcome to all, have been pastoral challenges. I'm sure I have not always succeeded. Our common prayer together offered a lot of strength and solace in the midst of anxiety and fear-leading up to the election, in its aftermath, later when the Capitol was attacked, and then as we prepared for the inauguration.

Our prayers and community sustained us, and so did some other activities. We had a wonderful Harvest Dinner, with performances and video, thanks especially to the work of Rachel Sedor and John Thompson. We managed to celebrate 12th night online with hilarity and soul. Throughout the summer we had a series of parish art shows online, showcasing the remarkable talent within our congregation, hearing from the artists about their work and enabling parishioners who had never met to learn something significant about each other. We also worked with art in our Advent forums, contemplating paintings and poetry about John the Baptist and the Annunciation. Our church building has long been known for its art and architecture- but this year I especially appreciate the way the arts nourish our life together in difficult times.

Another feature of this year has been the question of when and how we might meet together in person again. I have been conservative (not a word I usually use for myself) about reopening. We established a task force on reopening in the early summer, and it has worked with great dedication, looking at issues of public health, worship, community needs, technology and much more. We have reopened our garden to the community, and then our church building for prayer and meditation two days a week. We held three small mid-week Eucharists this fall, but halted them both because the Covid numbers in New York were climbing and because a staff member tested positive for Covid. The committee's fuller report appears elsewhere in these pages, but I

want to express my gratitude to them by name: Ed Chinery, Steve Hubbard, Andrew Jones, Dennis Keene, Scarlett Murphy, Tom Rice, Kate Rutherford, Isabel Spencer, Madonna Stack-Barker, John Thompson, Matt Vermedahl.

As we come to our annual meeting in 2021, there is much be thankful for. Our community first of all, and the new, sometimes very intimate ways of being community that we have discovered through the unexpected medium of Zoom. The wonderful leadership of our wardens, Isabel Spencer and Maurice Seaton, our vestry, our clergy and staff. They have all worked tirelessly, creatively and gracefully under difficult conditions this year, and I am very grateful.

We must continue to be careful, to meet online for yet awhile longer, to wear our masks and wash our hands and get vaccinated when we can. We must also continue the work of seeking to build the Beloved Community, to borrow Dr. King's phrase- to strive for justice and peace and respect the dignity of every human being, in the church and beyond, in season and out of season.

I will close with some of the questions I am pondering.

What have we learned during this time of online worship? What do we want to take with us into the future when it is again possible to gather in person? What do we need in order to do that?

What, and who, has been neglected or fallen through the cracks? I am acutely aware that Zoom does not work for everyone. What work of healing and repair do we need to do? How can we welcome each other more fully?

What are we learning about racial justice and undoing white supremacy? About economic and environmental justice? About the urgency of this moment? What is ours to do at Ascension in particular?

How is God calling us in this difficult, remarkable time?

Thank you, dear people of Ascension, for the privilege of serving as your rector. Thank you for your prayers, your friendship and for your care for my family and me throughout a year unprecedented in my lifetime. May God continue to bless us all.

The Rev. Elizabeth G. Maxwell, Rector

Nominating Committee Report

Members of the Nominating Committee for the vestry elections in 2021:

Shana Kaplanov	Terry Rogers	Maurice Seaton (Chair)
Rusty Moore	Kate Rutherford	

The four vestry members in the class of 2021 whose terms expire:

Mary Gaillard	David Lehmann
Vin Knight	John Thompson

The Nominating Committee presents the following six candidates who are eligible under the Church of the Ascension bylaws for election or re-election to fill the four positions on Vestry, for a three-year term each:

Elizabeth Adams	Vin Knight (re-election)	Rachel Sedor
Garrett Dangler	Gale Lynch	John Thompson (re-election)

In addition, the vestry has nominated Isabel Spencer for a second, two-year term as warden.

Eligible voters may vote for up to four candidates for vestry and cast a**"** yes" or **"**no" vote for the warden position.

The vestry sincerely thanks David Lehmann and Mary Gaillard for their dedication and service to the parish as members of the vestry.

The Vestry may wish to consider a comprehensive review of the parish bylaws in the year ahead.

Maurice Seaton, Chair

Finance Committee and Treasurer's Report

Do we need to say that 2020 was a challenging and unusual year for the Finance Committee?

Highlights of our financial picture during 2020 are:

- PPP: We applied for and received a "loan" of $163,000 from the SBA's Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). This loan will be "forgiven" and become a grant to the church upon completion of an application, showing that the funds were used for salaries and utilities according to the rules of the program. The forgiveness application will take place in 2021. Until it has been approved, none of the income items discussed below include the PPP amount.
- Outside Contributions: Meetings such as 12 step programs, rent for groups using our space, weddings, and income from other organizations using our space for a one time project were down compared to the budget by $74,711 as a result of the pandemic.
- Pledge Income: Parishioners continued to pay their pledges during this time of uncertainty, and we give a big thanks for their generosity.
- Endowment Income: Our endowments continued to be strong over the course of the year.
- Diocesan Assessment: The Diocese of New York granted parishes a 25% reduction in their 2020 diocesan assessment. This resulted in a saving of $36,000.

The operating results for 2020, which are still being finalized, ended the year with a deficit of $248,392. This was $85,001 more favorable than budgeted. Income was $69,744 less than expected, primarily due to the reduction in rent and outside contributions. Expenses were less than budget by $154,745, as a result of the church and its programs being closed most of the year due to the pandemic, and the lower diocesan assessment.

The budget for 2021 anticipates an operating deficit of $371,518. We expect this deficit to be reduced by $163,000 when we receive forgiveness of the PPP loan. Over the past number of years, we have been working on reducing the deficit, thereby reducing the amount of endowment income which is needed to pay the shortfall. The budget includes a modest 1% raise for full-time

employees. The Diocese will again permit a reduction of up to 25% on the diocesan assessment, a reduction which for 2021 needs to be applied for on a quarterly basis. In total, expenses are expected to be $1,291,404, an amount higher than 2020's actual, but lower than budgeted.

On the income side, the amount we receive is projected to be $919,886. The budget includes 2021 pledge income of $380,000, matching the all time high pledge amount seen in 2020. However, we are expecting to continue to receive a lower amount from outside organizations until we return to "normal" later in the year. Pledge income still represents only about 29% of our budgeted operating expenses, consistent with the last few years. It is difficult to cover our operating costs and we rely too much on our endowment income.

The Finance Committee is continually looking for ways to increase income and decrease costs, and we are open to discussions with parishioners on this topic. Our relatively strong results in 2020 likely mean that we will not qualify for a "second draw" PPP loan, but the Finance Committee continues to explore this and other sources of potential government stimulus funding, including the Employee Retention Tax Credit, which was recently made retroactive to the beginning of 2020.

PARISH OPERATING INCOME	Budget 2020	Actual 2020	Actual Compared to Budget 2020	Budget 2021
Pledge and Offering Income *(includes pledges, loose collections, special offerings at Easter and Christmas)*	408,000	407,258	(742)	397,550
Outside Contributions/flowers *(Gifts from individuals, donations for flowers, weddings, honoraria from groups that use church facilities, La Petite Ecole)*	150,330	75,619	(74,711)	87,591
Endowment Income *(Income from various endowment funds designated for operating purposes)*	434,116	439,825	5,709	434,745
Total Operating Income	**992,446**	**922,702**	(69,744)	**919,886**

PARISH OPERATING EXPENSES	Budget 2020	Actual 2020	Actual Compared to Budget 2020	Budget 2021
Clergy *(Includes clergy salaries, pensions, health insurance, continuing education & ministry expenses)*	266,984	253,158	(13,826)	268,576
Administration *(Includes salaries for Parish Administrator, Bookkeeper,lay benefits, advertising, auditor, postage, telephone,office supplies, equipment maintenance, internet)*	379,685	339,835	(39,850)	415,265

Music	167,843	159,568	(8,275)	160,074
(Includes salary for Music Director, Sunday Choir stipends, and music costs)				
Building	274,246	241,662	(32,584)	265,547
(Includes custodial salaries, utilities, building supplies, property & liability insurance, furniture)				
General	36,500	12,109	(24,391)	23,010
(Includes reaching out to new members, hospitality, Sunday School and nursery, adult education, altar guild, altar flowers, pastoral care)				
Outside Giving	200,581	164,762	(35,819)	158,932
(Includes Diocesan Assessment and Designated Giving)				
Total Operating Expenses	**1,325,839**	**1,171,094**	(154,745)	**1,291,404**
Operating Income/(Deficit)	**(333,393)**	**(248,392)**	85,001	**(371,518)**

John Grimes, Chair; Mary Gaillard, Treasurer

The members of the Finance Committee during 2020 were Mother Elizabeth Maxwell, Wardens Isabel Spencer and Maurice Seaton, Finance Chair John Grimes, Treasurer Mary Gaillard, Charlie Schmidt, Phillips Smith and Madonna Stack-Barker. Jacob Scott joined the committee for part of the year. Phil Smith stepped down from the committee in October, and we thank him for his years of service and for pushing us to look at the budget in new ways.

The Finance Committee generally meets monthly during the year or more frequently, as required, to monitor the current year's budget, comparing it with actual income and expenses and working closely with the bookkeeper. The Committee prepared the 2021 operating budget, which was approved by the Vestry at its January meeting. Thanks to zoom we were able to keep this schedule.

Following the retirement of our long time bookkeeper, Vince Amodei, at the end of 2019 we hired a temporary bookkeeper, Laurie Ross, who continues to keep our finances in good shape.

The Committee works with the Endowment and Investments Committee to review the results of our endowment funds. The Endowment and Investments Committee meets with our investment managers periodically to monitor, discuss, and direct the investment strategies.

We obtained a line of credit of $2.5 million from Fiduciary Trust Company International in 2008. This allowed us to manage our cash flow in 2009 and to the present, as we completed the restoration of the Church and the renovation of the Rectory. The loan was structured so that we only drew down from it the cash that was needed at the time to pay our invoices, paying a low interest rate on a quarterly basis. We have paid back some of the loan with funds from our previous and current capital campaigns, as well as from some of the accrued income from some of our endowment funds. A large portion of the income we receive from La Petite Ecole is being used to pay down the loan as well. We still have the task of paying back the amount outstanding, which

is currently approximately $1.0 million, and in the meantime we are paying interest of approximately $40,000 per year.

Fiduciary Trust Company International manages the first ten endowment funds listed below, and the Bank of New York Mellon manages the Maintenance Fund Addition. A number of smaller funds are invested in the Diocesan Investment Trust, maintained by the Diocese of New York.

Most of these funds are restricted as to their use, and others are available to be applied towards the operating expenses of the Church.

As of December 31, 2020, the following values of the endowment funds were reported:

General and Endowment Fund	$2,551,917
Maintenance Fund	1,052,786
Catherine B. Fair and Esther D. Hamilton Memorial Fund	1,361,353
Mr. and Mrs. Charles Ralph Hayden Visscher Memorial Fund	506,843
Susy I. and Harriet E. Babcock Memorial Fund	441,808
Catherine B. Fair and Esther D. Hamilton Memorial Choir Fund	210,834
Marguerite W. Sinaly Memorial Window Maintenance Fund	1,053,176
John R. Meekin Music Fund	2,038,067
Robert E. Lowder Fund	1,832,053
Special Account	209,809
Maintenance Fund Addition	3,913,068
Various Restricted Funds (DIT)	89,826
Total	**$15,261,540**

Capital Campaign Report

Last year, 2019, was the third and final year of the capital campaign, "Building Our Future," which directly followed the capital campaign, "One World Campaign." However, payments towards the campaign continued to come in during 2020.

As reported at last year's Annual Meeting, pledges paid by the end of 2019 totalled $593,880 for both campaigns. This year, $55,211 was received. This enabled us to pay down an additional $50,000 towards the outstanding loan that we have with Fiduciary Trust. The loan amount now stands at approximately $1.0 million.

We thank all who have contributed to this capital campaign over the past several years. And if you haven't finished paying your pledge, it's not too late!

Mary Gaillard, Treasurer

Associate Rector's Report

By mid-March, the United States entered into quarantine. Less than a month after that, The Church of the Ascension – our spiritual home – found ourselves very much involved in a process of learning. We were learning more than we could ever have anticipated – about ourselves, about each other, and about God. With Mother Liz's leadership, we began to embrace new ways of

thinking and feeling. We did our best to ensure that as many of the vulnerable and even not so vulnerable – within and around our parish community – were contacted and cared for. In that process and in on-line worship and fellowship, we found ourselves exploring the meaning of "presence" and how, through us, God's very existence can better be seen and heard and felt.

Very much in tandem with this learning and growth, Ascension Outreach, Inc. discerned a desire to maintain pantry service as best we could. (We've managed not to miss a single food distribution date – although we had to reschedule one.) We'd transitioned in June 2018 to a client-choice pantry model but knew this would not be in keeping with best public-health practices during a pandemic, so we reverted to our original method, i.e., distributing pre-packaged bags of non-perishables. Early on in the pandemic, our visitor population was quite small – about 30 families – but we've since returned to more than our normal number – over 100 per operating Saturday. And we're happy to say that we offer fresh produce (usually three kinds) and plenty of cooking oil (our most popular inventory item) each and every time we serve. It can't be overstated, however, that none of this could happen without the kindness of our volunteers, whose love and devotion go a long way in demonstrating God's existence!

As our pantry visitor population is comprised of over 90% who self-identify as mono-lingual in Chinese, it's very handy that in 2020 Episcopal Charities (one of our funders and great supporters) helped us to identify another three Chinese-speaking volunteers who not only assist us greatly with visitor check-in and communication in general, they're also very interested in improving our data-collection methods. We've also been blessed to have several members of the NYPD 6th precinct with us on a number of occasions, to assist with crowd control, etc.

In the second quarter of 2020 Food Bank NYC offered, for wholesale purchase, various kinds of equipment. We obtained commercial refrigeration units (2-door refrigerator and 2 single door freezers). This enables us to receive more and better fresh produce, dairy, and frozen chicken, fish and beef (less sodium). It's our hope that both the program and the parish will see great benefits in the coming year, e.g., piloting a soup kitchen program (possibly rising from our People Who Lunch and/or 20s/30s groups), and, with some minor changes (to be sponsored by Ascension Outreach, Inc.) to the basement kitchen (beneath the parish hall) preparing the parish for more and better commercial use of the parish hall.

Finally, Ascension Outreach, Inc., in partnership with Resistance Cinema, screened segments from a powerful film: "The Best Democracy Money Can Buy" in early October. As the national election was still approaching, we had a good turnout and much energetic discussion. Our discussion was so energetic, in fact, that we scheduled another meeting for discussion only, which was enthusiastically attended by several passionate, sensitive and creative supporters. We're planning for several more films and discussion to be offered throughout 2021.

The Rev. Edwin Chinery, Associate Rector

Priest Associate's Report

What a year it has been (and that's an understatement)! I do not think I could have gotten through this difficult and trying year without the graceful holding of the Ascension family — from my clergy colleagues to all of you who join us in Zoom services during the pandemic, both from far and near. To say that we have all been adapting on the fly is another understatement. Thank you

all for your willingness to allow your clergy to fumble, grow, and make mistakes along the way as we have worked to find new ways to worship when worship cannot be "in the building." Church has proven to be alive and strong and vibrant, even with physical distancing, and it is with immense gratitude for all that we have accomplished and how strongly we have stayed knit together that I write at the start of this new year.

The year began with several really successful Contemplative Gaze events, starting with an interfaith weekend of engagement between Christ Church Riverdale and the Conservative Synagogue of Adeth Israel of Riverdale in January, and culminating with leading the deacons' ordination retreat up at Holy Cross in early March. In between, I was at St Luke in the Fields as well as Holy Apostles for their vestry retreat. It has been hard to be unable to build on that momentum because of the virus, but I remain faithful though that my work with art in church sanctuaries will once again find a foothold post pandemic. My hope is that this time of isolation from our sanctuaries will actually engender an even greater appreciation of them when we are able to return. Thank you for allowing me to do some limited work virtually over this year with you all during forums. It helps to keep the flame alive!

I continue to serve on the Anti-Trafficking task force for the Diocese of NY, and we are scheduled to have a double event on human trafficking awareness for high school students (and their parents) in later January. As with all ministries, we had to move to a virtual model for this pandemic time. We are hoping that we will get a robust attendance at these two informational events.

The Ecumenical and Interfaith Commission has continued to meet virtually. Pre-pandemic in late February, I led a Contemplative Gaze session with them during a larger meeting with our Province II counterparts in other dioceses, offering the process as an example of how interfaith dialogue could be encouraged. More recently, the Jewish/Christian engagement sub-committee (of which I am part) created a video of an extended interfaith discussion between a priest in our diocese and a rabbi up in Woodstock. A link to the discussion is here: vimeo.com/488959409/048185d5d0

This year I was invited to join a new diocesan group that is creating a website specifically focused on justice advocacy in the Diocese. Our goal is to streamline the process so that any calls for action that come out of the various justice initiatives can be found on that one website. Whether you are interested in environmental justice, cash bail, anti-human trafficking, or HALT Solitary Confinement, if you want to learn about concrete actions you can take to support those causes, our website will be the place to go. We are hoping that this website will launch in the next month or two.

Sadly, the pandemic has limited our ability to protest this year, despite such work in the streets being sorely needed. I have, however, continued to write once every 4 weeks for The Resistance Prays (as I have since shortly after it started publishing its faithful Christian responses to Trump-ism daily, early in 2017). Now that we will have a new administration, TRP will be re-assessing its mission, so I will wait to see what it becomes. This president will be gone, but the forces that gave rise to him will most certainly not be, so resistance will quite likely still be required.

The Needlework Ministry at Ascension also continues virtually, and it is a joy to be part of that work. Please take a look at their write up in this annual report.

On a more personal note, Philippe and I moved into the Village in early November, just south of Washington Square Park. We both look forward to being able to walk to Ascension when we are able to gather again. The hardest part of this pandemic for all of us Episcopalians has been the absence of the tangible sacramental worship and liturgies that we all love so much — the lack of being able to see each other, to bless each other, to hold hands, to hear live music, to sing together, to be fed at the altar, and to gladden each others' hearts by being together. We know that this will return, and we pray that it may do so soon. God bless us and keep us as we walk forward together into the new realities of 2021.

The Rev. Posey Krakowsky, Priest Associate

Wardens' Report

The role of your wardens is to work as part of a team, in a sense the executive leadership of the parish, alongside the Rector and in collaboration with the Vestry. We are fortunate at Ascension to have in Mtr Liz, our Rector, a person who cares deeply about the well-being of parishioners and staff alike. As Wardens, we care for and offer counsel to Mtr Liz, and each other, for the advancement and spiritual well-being of the parish as a whole.

2020 will be chronicled as a watershed year in the life of our parish, given the life threatening Covid-19 pandemic that has engulfed and threatened the very survival of our world. Indeed, life has changed markedly as result of the pandemic. Change will continue, in expected and unanticipated ways, even after a vaccine has immunized most of us. How prepared are we?

A longing for in-person corporate worship and the experience of superior choral music on Sundays is only deepened by the profound absence of Holy Communion. These manifestations of our life together have been part of the spiritual rhythms for most of us for many years. They nourish our souls and their lack weighs heavily on us, often leaving a real sense of loss and sadness. We need to acknowledge this, and know that we are all committed to the return of these, and other marks of our parish life, as soon as it is safe to do so.

The emergence of online worship, music, learning and fellowship opportunities was a highlight of 2020. The commitment of clergy, musicians, staff, and parishioners, together with the unstinting technological wizardry of John Thompson, has made up for some of what we have lost in terms of corporate identity and togetherness. One challenge for us is to find ways to continue the best of these practices.

The quality of preaching at Ascension has reached new levels of excellence in pandemic times, for which we rejoice greatly. The ordination to the priesthood of our own Mtr Meredith Ward, and her inclusion on the preaching and Forum roster has been a particular highlight over recent months. Thank you to everyone for adapting to these incredibly challenging circumstances and making online worship a spiritually nourishing and uplifting experience.

Financial matters were a particular concern in 2020, given the uncertainty wrought by the pandemic. We gratefully acknowledge the loyalty and dedication of all who made a financial

pledge or gift in 2020, which allowed our pledge income to remain steady. We are also seeing the benefits of a more robust and online giving platform that offers givers more options and even includes giving by text message. To friends, old and new, who gave generously in financial and other ways to sustain Ascension's financial obligations, we extend our thanks. Mary Gaillard, our Treasurer, deserves our deep gratitude for the extraordinary amount of time and attention she gives to ensuring that our finances are in order.

We are proud to have received a federal government Payroll Protection Program (PPP) loan that enabled us to avoid the retrenchment of any of Ascension's dedicated and beloved staff. Overall our endowment portfolio continued to produce stable and significant income for the parish. The diocese provided budget relief in terms of a 25% assessment reduction. However, the parish lost almost half of regular rental income from tenants and space users.

In his Letter to the Philippians (2:4) Paul challenges: "Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others." In essence, this is our Christian calling, to love one another and to share God's love with all whom we encounter. As your wardens, we pray for you. And we are ready to lead our parish into a hopeful future and a more just society. Pray for our country, for our beloved community, for all who call Church of the Ascension home, and for those who God touches through us.

Maurice Seaton & Isabel Spencer, Wardens

Reports of Committees, Groups, Guilds, & Ministries

Acolytes and Chalice Bearers

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, 2020 saw an abbreviated year for the Acolyte/Chalice Bearer Guild.

Before the lock-down, we had the honor to participate in two events at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine: For the annual Absalom Jones service, James Amodeo carried the Ascension banner in procession, while Lisa Dunn, Michael Surabian, John Grimes and Tom Rice served as acolytes for the Ordination to the Transitional Diaconate for Meredith Ward.

Our current Guild Roster includes: Elizabeth Adams, James Amodeo, Eve Beglarian, Nikhil Bettua, Daniel Cole, Lisa Dunn, Jonathan Fairhead, Janet Fisher, Mary Gaillard, John Grimes, David Lehmann, Rusty Moore, Isabel Spencer, Amy Shaw, Michael Surabian, Shana Weber and Stanley Weinberg.

As always, we cannot thank our members enough for all their hard work and dedication during the shortened year. Their constant willingness to step in at a moment's notice to fill in for another Guild member, serve at special services and endure hours of rehearsals fills us with pride and gratitude. We all look forward to a return to the church as soon as possible in 2021. And, of course, we are extremely grateful to Mtr. Liz, Fr. Ed and Mtr. Posey (and Mtr. Meredith) for their ever available and welcomed guidance and support.

Candace Lombardi & Tom Rice, co-Sacristans

Altar Guild

As with many other groups at Ascension, the work of the Altar Guild during 2020 was severely curtailed as the result of the pandemic. Prior to the last regular Sunday services on March 8, 2020, the Altar Guild continued its usual work of setting up the altars before and cleaning up after each worship service. We had completed our usual changeover of the sanctuary for the Lenten season, and Tom Rice and I were working with the Buildings and Grounds Committee to review architectural drawings for the potential relocation and refurbishment of the Altar Guild cabinet. While these plans are on hold at this point, we have some interesting ideas to explore when the time comes.

During our time "out of church," various members of the Guild have served on the Reopening Task Force to help consider how we might safely conduct services. In November, Tom Rice and I assisted with Altar Guild at the three Wednesday physically-distanced Eucharists that were held at the freestanding altar.

Notwithstanding our limited role this year, I remain very grateful for the hard work of the Altar Guild members. I would especially like to thank Lisa Dunn and David Lehmann for their help in washing and ironing the linens, and Len Bowman and the sexton staff for their help with the candles and brass polishing, which we enjoy seeing even virtually on Zoom.

Members of the Altar Guild in 2020 were: Eric Achacoso, Eve Beglarian, Stacey Carpenter, David Cholcher, Garrett Dangler, Lisa Dunn, Mary Gaillard, Mary Gossy, John Grimes, Kristin Jackson, David Lehmann, Candace Lombardi, Robert McDonald, Tom Rice, Kate Rutherford, Rachel Sedor, Maurice Seaton, Isabel Spencer and Meredith Ward. While we may not know exactly what "church" will look like in 2021, the Altar Guild will be there to serve when called, and we are always looking for new members. Please join us!

John M. Grimes, Chair

Archives Report

Historical records of the Church of the Ascension, previously indexed and (where possible) scanned as pdf files, were transferred to the Diocesan Archives housed at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. They are now preserved and stored in a climate-controlled environment in acid-free archival files and boxes. Ascension retains ownership of the materials.

Vin Knight, Archivist

Buildings and Grounds Committee

Clean. Delay. Clean. Delay. That seems like the story for our Buildings and Grounds Committee in 2020. But against all odds, there are some success stories.

With Madonna Stack-Barker's invaluable assistance, protocols were designed and implemented for frequent cleaning of the church and other public spaces. Matt Vermedahl designed opening and social-distancing signs. The building staff itself took on door duties when the church is open. But meanwhile, our biggest project goal – the new fire alarm system for the church – was delayed due to complications with the Department of Buildings.

On the good news side, we are very close at this writing to completion of our three-pronged set of improvements to the narthex and columbarium: new lighting, clean and improved flooring, attractive new mats for use during inclement weather, and new carpeting for the entire narthex. Stop by and take a look when you are able.

Ascension Outreach presented us with a challenge that was put to it by the Food Bank of New York: How to receive healthy refrigerated and frozen food to pass along to its clients. Through Father Ed's grantsmanship, AO received two new freezers, now humming away in the Parish Hall basement with new electrical lines, and a very large fridge, which found a home in the Parish Hall kitchenette.

Those moves, in turn, paved the way to improve the third-floor kitchen, used by staffers and our renters. The relatively new cabinets from the Parish Hall kitchen were moved upstairs, and new paint, microwave and flooring are making the space brighter and more useful.

Planning for the future continues: Thanks to Barbara Burns' efforts, we are ready to deploy a team to examine the outside brownstone for potential weaknesses. And of course there's still the fire alarm….

The committee gives heartfelt thanks to our sexton, Len Bowman, and his staff, Ravi Gayadin and William Gordon, particularly in these challenging times.

Isabel Spencer for the committee: the Rev. Liz Maxwell, Maurice Seaton, Burns, Sibyl Piccone, Garrett Dangler, Lisa Dunn, Tom Rice, Stephen Payne, Charlie Schmidt.

Isabel Spencer, Convener

Discernment Committee

The Discernment Committee plays a role in helping individuals in our parish discover their "call to ministry." The committee enters into an intentional relationship with the aspirant on the behalf of the parish and advises the Rector in her consideration to recommend the person to move from the parish discernment level to the Diocesan level. The committee also serves to support those already in the process leading to ordination.

Taking a journey with someone who hears God's call in their life is a profound honor. It involves listening not only with our ears but with our hearts, and challenging each other to focus on the still small voice inside the aspirant as she or he discerns what the next step might be in their spiritual formation.

In 2020 the Discernment Committee met (via Zoom) with a potential aspirant. The committee looks forward to continuing our conversation with that aspirant in 2021.

Committee members in 2020 were: David Cholcher, Peter Clark, Janet Fisher, Sibyl Piccone.

Eve Beglarian, Convener

Docents Guild

Because of the pandemic, the Docents' Guild has suspended activities. They will be resumed as soon as possible. Members include: Daniel Cole, Garrett Dangler, Dorothy Decrescenzo, Gretchen Dumler, Lisa Dunn, Liz Hill, Gjan Jones, Sara Jones, Peter Nordeen, Tom Rice, Maurice Seaton, Isabel Spencer, Jill Tildesly, and Catherine Tinker.

Liz Hill, Chair

Flower Guild

It has been my great honor and privilege to serve as Florist and Gardener to the Church of the Ascension, NYC. This year has been challenging for US all, I regret I must resign this post. It is a great opportunity for a creative person with a passion, it is a joyful ministry. Floral decor at the church is always a great way to celebrate an important occasion, whether it be a wedding, a baptism, an anniversary, or a memorial. Remember me when the daffodils in the northeast corner bloom.

Sara Jones, Chair

Hospitality and Activities Guild

For the Hospitality Guild, 2020 started like most years - we hosted the lively annual Epiphany event, assisted with the Shrove Tuesday feast, and held regular coffee hours following the 11am services. Then mid March came and our church gatherings were halted due to the lockdown and have been since, save a couple weekday services in October and November. Obviously not being able to gather physically has greatly affected the Hospitality Guild but the big surprise and blessing has been the success of our Zoom services, particularly the newly adapted Coffee Hour. It has been amazing to see how many folks stick around afterwards to chat and have coffee! To further enhance our fellowship the clergy arranged wonderful forums throughout the year during coffee hour. Some highlights were the artists presentations, racial justice forums, and conversations with Mother Meredith and our Seminarian Linda. As head of the Guild I am representing Hospitality in the Church Reopening Task Force, assisting in ways to plan our reopening and future gatherings safely. We look forward to more online community, and we will be planning new ways to expand and improve on such. If you have any ideas of your own to share about activities or how to enhance Hospitality online please let me know! Thank you all for your participation during the most unusual of years - looking forward to a brighter 2021 and hope we can all be together in person soon!

Matthew Vermedahl, Chair

Music Program

The year began just like any other year, and then "wham!"

At the beginning of March, organ builder Pascal Quoirin and his team came for two weeks to do a 10-year "tune up" of the organ. They fixed some things which had gone astray since the organ was built (including the 32' Bourdon), regulated all the reed stops, installed a whole new winding system for some of the pedal pipes to give them more air (and volume), and installed a newly-rebuilt and re-voiced Pedal Bombarde 16' & 8' and Basson 16'. I gave the Quoirin team Purell and explained that this new virus had already hit NYC, so they should be very careful – avoid people and use the Purell. Suddenly, on March 12, one day before they were scheduled to return to France, they informed me that their plane had been cancelled, but that they were able to get on a plane

that evening. So “au revoir, Denis!” and off they went. Fortunately, they were already done with their work.

Then everything happened very quickly and by Sunday, March 15, the church was closed for many months. We had to improvise and adapt week by week to find the right service format for Ascension. The first Sunday, March 15, there was a recorded service available on Facebook for people to watch. I had recorded some organ pieces that were used in some of the first services. The first live Zoom service was on March 22 and the only hymn was one stanza of Amazing Grace, which I played on my piano at home. We experimented, I called colleague music directors in NYC: “what are you guys doing?” For the first few weeks, the music consisted of hymns played by me live on my piano at home and playing anthems from Voices of Ascension recordings. The next big step came from our beloved Hai-Ting Chinn, who not only sings gorgeously, but knew how to edit together recordings of individual singers on hymns (with me at the piano) and sew them together. Jeffrey Johnson rang a call to worship bell and sang a chant live each Sunday to get us started.

Before long, we were settled on a routine that worked for us and gave us much sustenance for many months. People would tune in to Zoom early and chat with each other. Then, at 11:01 came Jeffrey’s wonderful chants, which were chosen with more care and imagination than anyone in the world could do. They always were (*are* – at the time of this writing) lined up with the theme of the day. And his variety of musical choices was extraordinary. There were two hymns each Sunday. I would record the accompaniment on my home piano, send the audio file to Hai-Ting, who in turn sent it to a quartet of singers. They would record their parts, send them back to Hai-Ting, and she would sew it all together. An anthem each week came from the vast recorded archives of Voices of Ascension. Holy Week, of course, was a great challenge and project. Each service was the result of a huge amount of thinking, discussing and work. My beloved choir surprised me with a composite video of all of them singing Durufle’s *Ubi caritas* which we used in our Maundy Thursday service.

For the singers, the loss of virtually all their income over night was devastating. Taking that into account, our wonderful Rector, Wardens and Vestry decided to pay all choir wages through the end of the season (through Pentecost). The choir was practically in tears with gratitude for this generosity. It saved many of them from going bankrupt. Additionally, a few anonymous donors of the parish helped out some individual choir members who were in particularly dire straits. It was overwhelming how our parish came together to help one another!

In October, the music for our Zoom services expanded greatly to the joy of everyone! I consulted a top NYC sound engineer about what recording equipment to purchase in order to record members of the choir and organ for use in the Zoom services. We hired 10 singers per week, gave them all “singer masks,” and each Sunday afternoon recorded them in an anthem and two hymns. They were spread 15 feet apart, front to back, and 8 feet apart to their sides. To keep everyone together I conducted from the center aisle and had an organ accompanist. I recorded an organ prelude each week on Saturdays. So, the Zoom services starting on Oct. 11 included an organ Prelude, a Jeffrey chant, an opening and closing hymn and an anthem. It’s difficult to explain the difference this made from the quartet and piano music of the first many months. To hear members of our choir, obviously singing in the gorgeous acoustics of our church with our organ, brought a new level of musical, spiritual sustenance to the congregation. It felt like a home-coming of sorts.

It also brought much-needed income to our wonderful choir members. (Note: there were no 9am or 7pm services during this period. There *were* Monday-Friday 5:30 Evening Prayer Zoom services, but without music. Mtr. Liz recorded weekly Meditation services which people could watch. These included a choir anthem and a hymn, already recorded for the 11am service. A few Wednesday 6pm live, in person Eucharist services without music were started in the Fall, but quickly shut down due to rising infection rates.)

I am grateful to everyone who helped get us through this year. In addition to those already mentioned, I give my deepest thanks to Susie Braden and G. Jan Jones. God bless you, dear friends. We couldn't have done it without you!

As I write this report in January, 2021, we know it will still be many months before we can return to live, in-church services. But, with people beginning to receive vaccines, and a new chapter in Washington, it feels like there is a light at the end of the tunnel. We mourn the many, many people lost in this pandemic. We are grateful for those who were infected but survived it. I, personally, am grateful to have had my Ascension family to keep me embraced in their love during this terrible, terrible time. May we continue to hold on to each other and come out of this period stronger and more united than ever.

Dennis Keene, Choir Director and Organist

Ascension Music, Inc.

When the last note of our January, 2020 Baroque concert faded away, little did we know that that would be the last live normal concert until… ?

As New York shut down in a matter of days in mid-March, it quickly became clear that we would have to cancel all remaining concerts of the 2019-2020 concert season. It was devastating. What were we to do? How would we survive? Fortunately, like the Ascension parish, we got the government PPP money, and some individuals and foundations gave us special funds to keep going. But how do you keep in touch with your audience base and provide some kind of musical sustenance?

Our immediate answer was *Voices of Connection*. On March 31 we began sending an email that went to everyone on the Voices' list, containing a recording of a piece of choral music from the vast Voices archives – all the Delos recordings and the many live concerts which were recorded over the years. Thousands of people have received this moment of beauty <u>every single morning</u> from March 31 and continuing to this day (in January 2021.) The response from people all across the world has been amazing.

Other virtual projects followed over the months: I gave lectures on the music of Duruflé, Bloch, and Renaissance Music. We had a spectacular virtual Gala celebrating the 30th Anniversary of Voices of Ascension. What a moving night that was! Also, a Candlelight Holiday virtual concert in December.

The tragic death of George Floyd inspired a whole new direction in Voices: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. I spent weeks discussing how to find more singers of diversity for my ensembles (Voices and also for the church choir). This has resulted in the launching of a major auditioning program

for singers of diversity – to locate them and bring them into the pool of professional choral ensemble singers in New York City. Meanwhile, the Voices staff and Board spent equal amounts of time in addressing the situation in terms of staff, Board, and musical repertory.

In the early Fall, small scale outdoor chamber concerts were given in front of the church to socially distanced audience members. That is expected to resume this Spring and Summer. And many other projects are in the hopper until that day when a live indoor concert can once again take place. Dennis Keene, Artistic Director

Needle Crafter's Guild

The Ascension Needle Crafters began meeting a little over two years ago. We have about twelve regular attendees. All are welcome regardless of skill level and we have very experienced crafters who are happy to teach and nurture novices. In these painful and often lonely times we have traded gathering around the table in our cozy rear parlor for meeting in our cozy homes via Zoom.

Our knit and crochet projects include lap robes for chemo patients, scarves and caps for the Christmas at Sea program, and baby clothes and blankets for newborns, the children of young mothers at risk.

As the pandemic hit, Needle Crafters Posey Krakowsky, Buff Kavelman, and Madonna Stack made hundreds of masks.

Our usual work has gone on and we have baskets of scarves, hats, lap robes, and baby clothes ready for delivery as soon as it's safe to do so.

Jeanette Shields, our master crocheter, deserves two shout-outs. Last fall, she made a beautiful, intricate afghan that was raffled off and won by Tom Rice, who gifted it to parishioner Barbara Head. We used to proceeds of the raffle to buy yarn for future projects. In addition, Jeanette's donations of crocheted hats and scarves were featured on the Christmas at Sea Facebook page.

We'd also like to send a shout out to Liz Hill, who wrote an article about our group that was published in the Fall 2019 edition of the *Episcopal New Yorker*. Her article not only highlighted our activities, but also linked us to the history of such initiatives in our faith tradition, going back to the Dorcas societies, whose express mission was to make clothing for the poor.

Over the two years we have been in existence we have continued to build community, to learn from each other, and to enjoy the satisfaction of providing something tangible and useful for people to enjoy. Joan Castagnone, Chair

Nursery & Sunday School

I would like to begin this report by acknowledging our appreciation and thanks to Sandra Bowman, our Nursery caretaker, for her continued dedication to the children of our parish.

As we began the year, we continued inviting and welcoming all children to sit through the service with their families. We realized that this was the preference of most of our children and their parents and it was working very well. For those children who were too young or who chose not

to sit through the service, we welcomed them to be in the Nursery where they were under the attentive care of Sandra Bowman. For those children, our Nursery door was always open and stocked with books, art materials and games, offering parents a place to take a child who needed a change of scenery or perhaps a change of diaper.

Since we had to shut our doors in March for the rest of the year, sadly, we were unable to realize any of our plans for a children's choir, our usual Easter festivities, the Halloween event or the Family Christmas service.

Sibyl Piccone, Director, Nursery & Sunday School

Parish Office Report

Like everyone else, this year has presented may challenges to the normal operations of the Parish Office. Pretty much overnight we transitioned from in-office/in-person-church to remote offices and worship. All in all, this went very smoothly!

Some things that were in already place that helped this happen smoothly were our existing VoIP phone system and out Microsoft Office Suite. The VoIP phone allowed me to simply take my office phone home with me, plug it in to our network and – voila! The phone works like I'm sitting at my desk. With Microsoft Office we already had access to cloud storage via their Onedrive solution. We had been planning a migration to the cloud for a while – this just moved that date up a bit. Between this and our existing remote access for the accounting system, our baseline systems were up and functioning within the week. That same week we added Zoom – so our worship never skipped a beat!

In hindsight, our migration from all in-person to all-remote has been amazingly seamless – but this could not have happened without the all-hands-on-deck work of staff and parish members.

Br. Andrew Jones, OSF, Parish Administrator

Personnel Committee

The role of the Personnel Committee is to develop and revise employment polices based on federal and state law; review and revise employee benefits; develop job descriptions, performance standards and evaluation tools; and update and revise the Employee handbook.

In 2020, the committee developed policies on harassment including sexual harassment; and equal opportunity employment which were presented to the Vestry for approval. The committee also reviewed all employee benefits and completed the revision of the employee handbook which will be presented to the vestry in 2021.

Those who participated on this committee were Mother Liz; Isabel Spencer, Maurice Seaton, David Cholcher, Kyle Cheseborough and Rusty Moore.

Madonna Stack-Barker, Chair

Planned Giving Committee/Ascension Angels Legacy Society

As a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic the Planned Giving Committee and the Ascension Angels Legacy Society did not host an active program of events and activities in 2020. We continue to encourage all members of our Ascension family to include the parish in their estate plans and

to inform us when you have done so. Each year, including in 2020, the annual stewardship materials ask if Ascension is in your will or estate plans. We appreciate all those who have made provision for a legacy gift to enable Ascension to continue to be the spiritual home for generations to come. If you wish to receive any information about planned giving options, or about purchasing a niche in Ascension's columbarium, please contact Andrew Jones at the parish office: 212-254-8620 or email: apjones@ascensionnyc.org

Maurice Seaton, Chair

Reopening Taskforce

This committee began meeting in the summer to begin the discussion of reopening the church for services and meetings. We met with staff and parishioners to establish cleaning protocols, and appropriate signage – both inside and out, as well as creating our NY State Business Preparedness Plan. We also worked with Dr. Dennis Keene to establish plans for safely reintegrating our music with our online worship.

Top of our list of priorities is the health and safety of staff, parishioners, and visitors. We are focused on how and when to reopen in such a way that protects the sanctify of our service and worship.

Reopening was set out in phases: first, opening for private prayer and meditation; and second, for small in-person mid-week Eucharist. The taskforce set thresholds for opening and closing. Prior to the second wave of infection, we were able to open for midweek Eucharist. The heightened infection numbers forced us discontinue the mid-week Eucharist.

We continue to meet to review and examine current situations, and to discuss our lessons learned from our on-line worship and community: what are the good things we will keep with us for the future? Submitted by Br., Andrew Jones, OSF, Parish Administrator

The Rev. Elizabeth G. Maxwell, Convener

Reparations Taskforce

Like so many of our projects and passions, the work begun by our task force has taken a back seat to our response to life in the time of COVID. Before the lockdown, our efforts had been re-invigorated by an influx of new members and the availability of new research tools. Recently, through the regularly meeting Racial Justice Discussion group, we were able to get back in touch with and re-energize that work. There is much to do. We are very behind the Diocesan time line. But, we are exactly where we need to be. Another year of tragic, brutal events in our nation and the response of Black Lives Matter have put us in a different place. These dynamic forces, and our own work, are helping to remove the scales from our eyes. We pray that 2021 brings us closer to our goal of understanding and repairing.

About Reparations: Our Church was founded in 1827 when New York City was heavily involved in the slave trade. The role of the Reparations Task Force at the Church of the Ascension is to collect and document information on the complicity of our Church in the institution of slavery and its subsequent history of segregation and discrimination. With guidance from the Diocesan Reparations Committee, it is our hope to present our findings to the parish in such a manner as to lead to discussion about the benefits our church derived from transatlantic slave trade, our deep

regret for that, and thoughts about apology and reparation to repair this historic wrong and its legacy.

We are looking for help with the research, the curation of related parish events and discussions, and the formulation of meaningful reparation options.

John Thompson, Terry Rogers, co-Chairs

Stewardship Committee

The theme of Ascension's stewardship campaign this year was "Be Thou My Vision," from the ancient Irish hymn we sing. Aware that some parishioners would be hurt by the pandemic, losing work and income, we did not incrementally raise the campaign goal, as we would normally do in better times, but kept it the same as last year, at $400,000. Our hope for reaching this still ambitious goal lay in our canvass callers persuading those who were able to generously increase their pledge amounts for this difficult time. As of January 12, we have received 86 pledges for a total of $351,269, with some expected pledges still outstanding.

Eric Achacoso & Peter Clark, Co-Chair

Ushers' Guild

During 2020 the Ushers' Guild served at the 11AM Sunday Eucharist from January until March, Ash Wednesday, and a few Wednesday night services in October. Guild members greet and seat worshipers and help with any special needs. They collect and bring forward the offering and open pew doors at the time of communion. This is a pleasant and sociable form of ministry, and new members are welcome. Those who participated in 2020 included: Robin Clements, Lisa Dunn, Mary Gaillard, Liz Garvin, John Grimes, Sirkka Kyle, Terry Rogers, David Lehmann, John Thompson, Robert McDonald, John Merryman, Barbara Matovu, Sarah Standing, Janet Sygar, Stanley Weinberg, Joan Castagnone, John Gibson, Liz Hill, Madonna Stack, Rusty Moore, Shep Skiff, Kyle Cheseborough, Jacob Scott, Gayle Lynch, Garrett Dangler, and Charles Schmidt.

Steve Hubbard, Chair

Welcome & Evangelism Committee

The Welcome and Evangelism Committee, co-chaired by Steve Hubbard and David Lehmann, was mostly conducted online during 2020. Twelfth Night in January was celebrated with music, jugglers, stilt walkers, face painters, food & drink and more on the last day of Christmas. The Greeters Guild was still active during 2020 along with the clergy and parish staff in seeing that newcomers are made to feel welcome. For 2021, we are discussing better ways to greet members who are new through Zoom services.

Steve Hubbard & David Lehmann, co-Chairs

The Church of the Ascension

in the City of New York
Fifth Avenue at Tenth Street

Parish House (offices and mailing address):
12 West 11th Street, New York, New York 10011

Telephone: (212) 254-8620, Facsimile: (212) 254-6520
Internet Address: www.ascensionnyc.org

Office Hours:
Monday - Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Worship Schedule during Pandemic:

Sundays:
Worship Service with music (Zoom) 11 a.m.
Meditation with Music (Facebook)

Weekdays:
Tuesdays and Fridays, Noon to 3:00 p.m.
Church open for private prayer and meditation

As circumstances allow, additional services will be offered.