

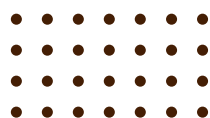


Ascension  
Lutheran  
Church

2024

# Annual Report

One Church, One Body, One Spirit,  
Serving All God's People



ASCENSIONMKE.COM



# A Note from Pr. Aida Muñiz

Beloveds,

Grace, peace, and hope to all of you.

Wow, the last 10 months have been a ride! What started as an “out-of-the-box” try to find a pastoral figure, ended up being the needed path to call a pastor. Thanks be to God! You have gone through a long journey of conversations, rediscoveries, faith, and now we see light at the end of the tunnel.

Yet, the journey has not ended; now, with enthusiasm, curiosity and renewed energy we will finally start moving forward leaving the pandemic’s aftermath behind us. I’m excited to walk with ALC as you start this Spirit-led adventure. Part of the journey is to towards what worked before that still works, and what does not anymore. Remember that pruning is necessary for strengthening.

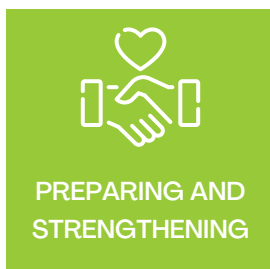
ALC is going from having three pastoral figures, to one. That’s a very big change and a wonderful opportunity for leadership to grow and strengthen, and for me to, as your pastor, to help you figure things out. Throughout these past ten months I’ve gotten to know most of you and build a relationship with the congregation, which means that we are not starting from zero. So, I encourage you to join the effort with the rest of ALC’s disciples, in whatever way you see fit for the sake of the community God has called us to serve.

There is a lot of work ahead, and I trust that as we move forward, God will equip, lead, and guide us. To God be all glory!

In Christ,  
Rev. Aida Muñiz

*Look throughout the annual report for notes from Pr. Aida for each ministry area!*

## MINISTRY AREAS



# Pastoral Report

# 2024



## The Last Ten Months in Review

- Following a list of some of the actions, events, and meetings that I engaged in during the last 10 months:
- Planned, officiated, and presided every regular Sunday worship, including all seasonal worships, from May 26, 2024, until today, except for 1 Sunday due to the ELCA Multiethnic Consultation in San Diego, CA. On that Sunday our brother Jose Guerrero preached during the 9am and 10:15 services. Thank you, Jose!
- Attended & led a workshop at Synod event “Together in Mission”
- Meetings with our tenants
- Participated in all “Central Conference” meetings
- Attended Council, Communication, Worship, and some building meetings
- Visits to hospitals, homes, one on ones, and pastoral care phone calls
- Attended Ladies’ Luncheons, Bible Studies, and Hmong Thanksgiving Lunch
- Planned & led a “know Your Rights” workshop for our Latino Ministry with the attendance of some congregational leaders, Bishop Erickson, and Immigration Attorney Mr. Cain Oulahan.
- Attended “Trunk or Treat” & “Family Day” events.
- Represented ALC at an ELCA Multiethnic Consultation in San Diego, CA
- Represented ALC at “La Mesa Latina” Synod Ministry



# Preparing and Strengthening

- Leadership Council
- More Than a Roof
- Building Team
- Stewardship
- Endowment (Pg 11)

## Ministry Teams



### Leadership Council

I'll never forget the day I received a phone call from Pr. Jon, asking if I could meet with him and Pr. Walter for lunch.

Not knowing what this was all about, I said yes and met with them. That was the day they asked if I would take on the position of Leadership Council President.

When I first became the LC President, I was a little nervous, wondering what my job was going to be like, and what were the challenges and expectations.

It did not take long to find out we had a Leadership Council team that immediately began working together. Our focus at that time and now is on our Church and the people of our Church. We have great commitment and communication from all three language groups!

It's easy to lead a team when everyone understands the needs of Ascension. The enthusiasm and commitments of our Leadership Council is wonderful and we can count on one another to help in doing what is right for Ascension!

We love our Church! We know that God is with us!

Cheryl Groth, Leadership Council President

### More Than A Roof

The More Than a Roof three-year capital campaign that began in January 2022 with promises of \$508,866 came to a close on December 31st. Contributions at the close of the campaign amounted to \$585,882. The final months of the campaign resulted in some very generous gifts that exceeded our campaign goal by \$77,016. We are so grateful for the faithful and generous gifts that have been made.

The total cost of the new roof and air conditioning units was \$863,600. A 20 year loan with the Mission Investment Fund provided the funds to undertake this critical project. Money raised in our three year campaign allowed us to make the monthly principal and interest payments on this loan as well as some additional payments on the principal. The balance of the loan as of December 31st was \$418,167. We are grateful to learn that there are contributors who are extending their gifting to this fund to help reduce this debt. We are hopeful that others will join these faithful contributors.

More Than a Roof Campaign Team: Lee Her, Cindy Jackson, Sue Kaschak, Diane Loppnow and Laura Ruiz



# Preparing and Strengthening

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- Building Team
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## Ministry Teams



### Building Team

The Ascension Building Team is responsible for maintaining, restoring, updating, and repairing building property; reviewing tenant leases and contracts; recruiting volunteers for minor repairs; ensuring a safe, well-kept environment; prioritizing improvements; and overseeing special projects.

Over the past year, the Building Team worked on several projects:

- Completed Phase 1 of a fire alarm system upgrade, with Phases 2 and 3 planned for 2025 and 2026.
- Installed an updated computer system for Ascension office staff.
- Restored the amphitheater following flood damage.
- Secured a new insurance carrier for Ascension.
- Searched for new tenants for spaces previously occupied by Street Angels and Children's Hospital.
- Handled lease renewals: The Synod lease is complete, The Gathering's is in progress, and renewals for SOC, LaFamilia, and Inner Beauty are planned for 2025.
- Developed property use policies and kitchen operating procedures.
- Monitored and addressed unauthorized overnight parking.
- Continued repairs for circuits and water leaks.

The team has identified parking lot improvements as a major project for the coming year. Ascension has a large and aging physical plant that require constant monitoring and system failures that require attention. Our building space also gives us the opportunity to partner with non-profit organizations that support our mission to be of service in the community and it also gives us income support for our church budget.

Building Team members are: Cheryl Groth, José Guerrero, Charlie Kudy, Chuck Kudy, Diane Lopnow, Jack Lopnow, Ed Riebe and Johnny Vang

### Stewardship

We conducted a fall Stewardship Drive in 2024 called "Because of God's Great Mercy". Through the use of mailings, emails, bulletin inserts and temple talks we encouraged our disciples to give generously to support God's work at Ascension. During this time of transition at church we characterize our results as both encouraging and challenging.

The number of giving unit pledges received to date for 2025 is 37, compared to 46 for 2024. The total number of pledged support for 2025 is \$128,405.84, compared to \$117,156.00 for 2024. Fourteen disciples increased their pledges from 2024 to 2025. In 2025 Grace and Ka Bao are planning to meet with Pastor Aida to engage more disciples in our Stewardship work and planning.

We ask you to remember that God's mercy comes to us in countless ways. Our Lord Jesus is chief among these. It is through the love and forgiveness that is ours in our Lord Jesus that we can boldly claim to be God's own people – not because of what we have done, but because of what God has done for us through his only Son.

Ascension Stewardship Co-Chairs Ka Bao Yang and Grace Thomsen.

# Worship and Gathering

- Worship Planning
- Altar Guild and Sanctuary Care
- Music

## Ministry Teams

### Worship Planning

The Unified Worship Planning Team is a small and dedicated group of disciples that meets monthly to plan for the following month's Unified Worship service. Our group meets virtually, which is very helpful. There is no president or other officers on this small team. Laura Ruiz serves as the note taker who then writes up the minutes and makes sure the office staff puts the dates for planning and worship on the church calendar. Laura sends the minutes to all disciples on the team & to the Office Manager.



This past year the team has consisted of Pastor Aida, Laura Ruiz, Jan Fox, Ar Lee, and Sterling Biggers. Occasionally, Office Manager Chuck Ellingson has been able to join us. Also, KaBao Yang participated when Ar Lee was unavailable. The team also consults with Roxanne Carloni to see if the Hand Bell Choir will be playing a piece for a Unified Worship Service and with Gao McCrary if she and her family will be singing. Our work consists of going through the liturgy, choosing hymns and organizing it all for a meaningful worship service. We are intentional to include music from all three language communities whenever possible which is why we have a representative from each language community as part of the group. Our group begins each meeting with a prayer & concludes each meeting with a date to plan for the next Unified Worship service.

We appreciate all who participate not only in the planning but all those who attend the Unified Worship services. We plan on continuing to meet monthly via Google Meet. The virtual format has been very helpful for this team.

Laura Ruiz

### Altar Guild and Sanctuary Care

Ascensions Lutheran Church Altar Guild is responsible for the maintenance of items on the altar and area around it. Those duties include:

1. Changing the cloths as needed
2. Preparing for communion
3. Candles
4. Advent wreath
5. Sanctuary Flowers – Seasonal/Special Event Ordering
6. Change hangings and banners according to the church calendar posted in the Sacristy.
7. Ordering lilies/poinsettias for Easter and Christmas seasons, as well as set up and arrange flowers in front of the altar.
8. Prepare the sanctuary for Lent and Good Friday

In 2025, we are seeking additional members to our team to help with these duties. Current members that are completing tasks listed above would be Robert Graf, Laura Ruiz, Sue Kaschak, Ar Lee, and Lee Her.

Roberta Graf, 414.312.3754

# Worship and Gathering

- Worship Planning
- Altar Guild and Sanctuary Care
- Music

## Ministry Teams



### Music

#### *Handbell Choir:*

The Handbell Choir rehearses from late September to early/mid-May, performing about every 5-6 weeks, including Christmas, Easter, and special events like Pastor Aida's installation. Rehearsals are held after the 9:00 service, with efforts to perform during unified services so all can hear the bells. Collaborations with Sterling Biggers and the House Band enhance some hymns. The group consists of seven full-time ringers, and outreach efforts to recruit from Hmong and Latino services continue. Music selections are being tailored to suit the smaller choir size.

#### *Ascension House Band & Musicians:*

Both, "Ascension House Band" and our Latino and Hmong musicians play weekly, providing vibrant worship music.

#### *Future Goals:*

Ascension aims to hire a music coordinator to expand musical offerings across all cultures within the congregation, fostering collaboration and creating a welcoming musical environment.

*Interested in reading or serving communion at service? Contact Chuck Ellingson, Jan Fox, Ar Lee or Pr Aida!*

*Chuck E.: 414.645.2933  
Jan Fox: 262.782.5680  
Ar Lee: 414.405.9202  
Pr Aida: 414.645.2933*



### **A Note from Pastor Aida on Worship and Gathering**

*Right now, ALC is equipped with good technology to provide livestream worship services every Sunday. Currently we are livestreaming the unified & special services, and some Hmong worship services, as well. It would be ideal to include our English and Spanish worship services as well. For that, we would need to recruit at least one volunteer per worship service to be trained by Johnny Vang and Kou Thao, who are the ones doing it so far. It's important we livestream our services, since some of our temporarily "home-bound" disciples have been requesting it. Also, I know by previous experience that livestream services can be an effective evangelism effort.*

*Ascension is already a hybrid church, since most of our meetings are done online. Providing steady online worship experiences every Sunday would be a very logical next step, especially if we already have the technology.*

*-Pastor Aida*

# Youth and Family

- Christian Education
- Vacation Bible School
- Youth Events and Sports

## Ministry Teams

### Christian Education

At this time, Sunday School for children ages 3 to 11 years old is only during the 11:30am service, however, Sunday School is for all children of Ascension disciples, friends and families. Sunday School is divided into three groups; group 1 is ages 3-5 years old with Ms. Ar, group 2 is ages 6-8 years old with Mrs. PangNha, and group 3 is ages 9-11 years old with Mr. Chue. Our hopes as teachers are to plant seeds and to teach the children to the best of our abilities and knowledge hoping that they will group up to be Christlike and to serve all people. In 2024, we had Games Night with the Youth, Easter Egg Hunt, Trunk or Treat, and we also had activities at the Ascension Church Picnic, too.

-Ar Lee

### ALC Youth and Family Events 2025

#### Youth Lock-In

- Date: TBD
- Time:
- Place: Ascension
- Contact: Kou Thao 414.378.2733

#### Easter Egg Hunt (Children)

- Date: Saturday, 5/3
- Event Time: 3:00 pm
- Park: Jackson (area # - TBD)
- Light Dinner/Snacks: Ascension – after event
- Contact: Ar Lee 414.405.9202

#### Last Day of Sunday School

- Date: Sunday, 6/8
- Outside, front patio
- Snacks, sidewalk chalks, etc.
- Contact: Chue Vang 414.241.9354

#### Frist Day of Sunday School

- Date: Sunday, 9/7

#### Trunk or Treat (Children, Youth, Family & Friends)

- Date: Saturday, 10/11
- Setup Time: 12:00 pm
- Event Time: 2:00 pm - 4:00 pm
- Place: Ascension Parking Lot
- Contact: PangNha Vang 414.336.8276





# Youth and Family

- Christian Education
- Vacation Bible School
- Youth Events and Sports

## Ministry Teams

### Youth Events and Sports

This past year in 2024, Ascension – MKE's youth went to the ELCA Youth Gathering in New Orleans on July 16th-20th. We drove to New Orleans on Monday night, the 15th and with the 16 hr drive, we arrived at our destination in the afternoon the next day. We had 3 big fundraisers to fund our trip: Waffle Breakfast, Latino Eats breakfast, and the Eggrolls. These fundraisers helped fund our trip with the application and hotel fees for the youth and leaders that attended.

The youth appreciates everyone who has contributed to all of the fundraisers and the donations from the congregation. With the start of this year, the youth will be having a Youth -Lock-in/sleepover at church on March 28th-29th. With Pastor Aida now called in, we can hopefully plan and start confirmation classes this year. I also plan to have youth nights every month or 2 where they can bond, play games, and have a devotion.

Youth President Yuna Chang and Vice-President Hannah Vang work alongside Pr. Aida and Youth Coordinator Kou Thao to plan and lead activities for the Ascension Youth program. They ensure that youth members stay engaged through meaningful events and gatherings. As the program grows, positions like Secretary and Treasurer will be added, giving more youth leadership opportunities. This helps build future leaders and deepens their investment in our congregation.

-Kou Thao, Youth Coordinator



### **A Note from Pastor Aida on Youth and Family**

*With the possibility of receiving a grant for youth work from Siebert Foundation, a group of ALC disciples and I, have been working on a program for our youth called: "S.W.A.G." (Saved With Amazing Grace). The expectation is to get it going this year, kicking it off with a "Lock-In" youth event at the end of March, led by some of our Hmong leadership and I. **Know, that the Youth Program will take place regardless of the Siebert Grant.***

*This Fall ALC will start Confirmation Classes with a group of approximately eight students. Right now, I'm starting to work on the curriculum I will be working with.*

*-Pastor Aida*

# Serving and Sending

- Communications
- Outreach/Evangelism
- AMIS (Ascension in Mission)

## Ministry Teams/Affiliates



### Communications

Ascension's communication team is dedicated to keeping the congregation informed and connected through various channels. They produce a monthly newsletter that highlights important events, updates, and messages from church leadership. The team also maintains the church's website, ensuring it is current, user-friendly, and a reliable resource for information. In addition to these tasks, they create other communication documents as needed to support the congregation's activities and outreach efforts. The team is currently working on designing welcoming areas at Ascension to effectively provide communication materials while also creating a warm and inviting atmosphere for visitors and members alike.

Communication Team Members: Cindy Jackson, Marilyn Lange, Gail Broderson-Heins, Susie Hess, Ar Lee, and Charlie Kudy.

### Interested in Outreach/Evangelism?

Contact Pr Aida or Cheryl Groth to find out more about how you can be part of helping Ascension MKE build out this team!

Pastor Aida, [pastoraida@ascensionmke.com](mailto:pastoraida@ascensionmke.com)

Cheryl Groth, [cagroth8@gmail.com](mailto:cagroth8@gmail.com)

### Ascension in Mission (AMIS)

AMIS has a 60 plus year history of mission support. In its early years the focus of AMIS (Ascension Mission) provided funds for missionary support in the greater church. It has since transitioned to provide financial support for local, national and global needs. The AMIS group meets quarterly in member homes for fellowship and discussion to identify programs that need financial support. The AMIS fund relies on the contributions of members, Thrivent Choice grants, \$5,000 of annual support from the Ascension Endowment Fund, and an annual fund raising event. The fund raiser for the past few years has been a fall sale of crysanthemum plants. The AMIS group has also sponsored fellowship following worship on a once a month basis. Free will offerings at this fellowship hour support materials needed for food as well as the general AMIS fund.

Program support during the past year included:

- Street Angels for their work with the homeless \$1,000
- Hephatha, Ascension's inner city sister congregation \$1,000
- Hartmut Memorial for Hartmut's work in Tanzania \$1,000
- Redeemer Church for the children of Gaza \$ 718
- Bread of Healing for its Milwaukee Health Clinic \$1,500
- The Gathering for their meal service in our neighborhood \$1,500
- Sojourner Peace for victims of violence \$1,500
- World Central Kitchen for global food programs \$2,500
- TOTAL mission support for 2024 \$10,718

AMIS welcomes all Ascension disciples into our group. Participants during 2024 include: Jan Fox, Pr. Gail Broderson Heins, John and Marge Hendrickson, Greg Joers, Tom and Sue Kaschak, Marilyn Lange, Jack and Diane Loppnow, Art and Sandy Maes, and Carla Schultz

# Ascension Endowment Board

“Forward with Christ, Adelante con Cristo, Nrug Yexus Moog”

It is quite remarkable that the message of Jesus to love the Lord and our neighbors as ourselves has been alive in our church in Milwaukee for almost 175 years. In 1852 a little group of Norwegian immigrants launched this mission and we now find ourselves, one Lutheran congregation with ministries in Hmong, Spanish and English having just called Pastor Aida Muniz to help lead us on the next steps of our amazing journey. In this Lenten season it is good to remember that 80 years ago on April 9, 1945, Hitler executed a Lutheran pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, for staying true to Jesus. In 1944, while in prison, Pastor Bonhoeffer sent a letter to a friend with an Outline for a Book he had hoped to write when free. One of his conclusions is worthy of our close attention: “The church is the church only when it exists for others.” We have much to do together.

Over 50 years ago, Ascension’s leadership created the Ascension Lutheran Church Endowment Board as a separate legal entity but made up of Ascension disciples and committed to the work and mission of Ascension Lutheran Church. Over the years, Ascension’s members have given hundreds of thousands of dollars to support our work (“[God’s] people faithfully brought in the contributions, tithes and dedicated gifts.” 2 Chronicles 31:12). Currently, the fund balance is roughly \$2.8 million.

Ascension disciples Jerry Vang, Kirsten Pezewski (treasurer), Chuck Kudy (secretary), Joan Semrad Hutchinson, Jim Andree, Laura Ruiz, Charlie Kudy, Cheryl Groth, and Mark Thomsen (president) serve on the Board. The Board, with help from Robert W. Baird advisor Shawn Zoltak, is responsible for the prudent investment and hopeful growth of the Fund. The Board is committed to continuing its \$100,000 a year contribution to support the budget and work of our Ascension Lutheran Church.

If you or a person you know wishes to contribute to this worthy cause, the Ascension Lutheran Church Endowment Board will warmly welcome the gift and put it to work for Jesus (“If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?” 1 John 3:17).

Peace, Mark Thomsen

## 2024 & 2025 Financial Summaries

Detailed 2025 Budgets are a separate handout, and can be received via email from Treasurer Charlie Kudy at [kudy826@gmail.com](mailto:kudy826@gmail.com)

|                       | Thru 12.31.24 Goal  | 12.31.24 Actual     | Through 1.31.25 Goal | 1.31.25 Actual     | 2025 Budget         |
|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Endowment             | \$100,000.00        | \$99,999.96         | \$16,600.00          | \$24,999.99        | \$100,000.00        |
| Donations             | \$205,000.00        | \$199,421.93        | \$34,030.00          | \$30,794.40        | \$205,000.00        |
| Building Rental       | \$147,411.00        | \$132,980.03        | \$22,855.96          | \$19,536.00        | \$137,686.52        |
| Misc                  | \$55,612.01         | \$33,309.92         | \$5,104.50           | \$(339.00)         | \$31,250.00         |
| Roof Donations        | \$-                 | \$82,916.00         | \$2,490.00           | \$5,842.00         | \$15,000.00         |
| <b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>  | <b>\$508,023.01</b> | <b>\$548,627.84</b> | <b>\$81,080.46</b>   | <b>\$80,833.39</b> | <b>\$488,936.52</b> |
| Administration        | \$305,059.01        | \$318,258.22        | \$46,890.02          | \$40,449.62        | \$282,470.00        |
| Ministry              | \$49,108.00         | \$38,470.62         | \$5,212.40           | \$2,350.00         | \$31,400.00         |
| Building              | \$129,815.00        | \$158,611.38        | \$24,360.50          | \$24,796.62        | \$146,750.00        |
| Utilities             | \$64,550.00         | \$62,889.83         | \$10,217.30          | \$18,378.14        | \$61,550.00         |
| Addtl Roof Prinp. Pmt |                     | \$45,000.00         | \$-                  | \$-                | \$-                 |
| <b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b> | <b>\$548,532.01</b> | <b>\$623,230.05</b> | <b>\$86,680.22</b>   | <b>\$85,974.38</b> | <b>\$522,170.00</b> |
| Difference            | \$(40,509.00)       | \$(74,602.21)       | \$(5,599.76)         | \$(5,140.99)       | \$(33,233.48)       |

# A Look Ahead to 2025

*Moving Forward, when I look at Ascension, I see a congregation that has gone through a few years of nonstop transition, uncertainty and very little stability. The good news is that very recently you have extended this Pastor a call which I am accepting.*

*There are many goals. We must improve our communication, organizational structure, protocols, and systems that in turn will make our work more efficient. None of these things are easy and quick to achieve, yet Ascension has, in my opinion, a great asset: leadership. With a long transition and lack of steady pastoral leadership, ALC's lay leaders had to step up and make changes, that ended up strengthening them.*

*This congregation is not done transitioning. Now, by God's grace and led by the Spirit, we move together into a time of curiosity, where we will explore, re-evaluate, and renew our ministries: old, current, and new. There is a lot of work ahead, and I trust that as we move forward, God will equip, lead, and guide us.*

*To God be all glory!*

*-Pastor Aida*



**DATES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE. PLEASE VERIFY WITH THE CHURCH CALENDAR ON THE WEBSITE**

**Get it on the Calendar!**

Contact Bonny López in the church office with any church-related meetings. Let's keep each other informed of our sacred work!

Bonny López,  
bonnylopez@ascensionmke.com

## Holy Week Schedule

- Palm Sunday:
  - Normal Service Schedule
- Maundy Thursday
  - Date: Thursday, 4/17
  - Time: 6:00 pm
- Good Friday
  - Date: Friday, 4/18
  - Time: 6:00 pm
- Easter Sunday
  - Date: Sunday, 4/20
  - Time: 10:00 am - Unified Service

## Eggroll Fundraiser

- Dates: Saturday, 7/12 & Sunday, 7/13
- Friday, 7/11-prepping, 6:00 pm
- Contact: Lee Her 414.477.8941

## Ascension Picnic

- Date: Saturday, 8/2
- Time: 11:00 am
- Park: Greenfield Park, Area 3B
- Food: Potluck
- Contact: Jerry Vang 414.477.2997

## God's Work, Our Hands (Anticipated)

- Date: Sunday, 9/21
- Time: 10:00 am - Unified Service

## Dias de los Muertos (Anticipated)

- Date: Sunday, 11/16
- Time: 10:00 am - Unified Service

## Thanksgiving Lunch

- Date: Sunday, 12/7
- Time: After 11:30 service
- Food: Potluck
- Contact: KaBao Yang  
920.246.5050

## Christmas Schedule (Anticipated)

- Date: Wednesday, 12/24
- Time: 4:00 pm

## Xyoo Tshab/Hmong New Year Celebration 2026

- Date: Sunday, 1/4/2026
- Time: 10:00 am - Unified Service
- Lunch: After service
- Food: Hmong Ministry
- Contact: Ar Lee 414.405.9202