

2025 Annual Report



Ascension
Lutheran
Church

One Church.

One Body.

One Spirit.

A Note from Pastor Aida Muñiz

Beloveds,

Grace, peace, and hope be with all!

As I review the year 2025, I have to say that our Spirit-led adventure continues. Sometimes this adventure feels like an acrobatic act and sometimes not so much. Like I said from the pulpit a few weeks ago: "Ascension, you are a HOLY MESS!" Yes, that is right, a holy mess. Daily work in a church that serves the people of its community is never easy, but always complex. Like the Letter to the Ephesians 4:16 says, we do the work as a whole body, joined and held together by strong ligaments.

You and I are the body, and the ligaments, the history of this church, the wisdom and collective memory, the Spirit-led impulse that keeps calling us. So I keep encouraging you, to join the efforts in whatever way you see fit for the sake of the community God has called us to serve.

***"You and I are the body, and the ligaments,
the history of this church, the wisdom and
collective memory, the Spirit-led impulse that
keeps calling us."***

Summary of year 2025:

Below is a list of some of the actions, events, and meetings I participated in last year:

- ✓ Plan, officiate, and preside over worship services, including those for festive seasons like Holy Week services, Christmas Eve, Virgen de la Guadalupe, and Día de los Muertos, to mention some
- ✓ Installed in May 2025
- ✓ Meetings with our tenants
- ✓ Participation in all meetings of the Synod's "Central Conference"
- ✓ Attended Council meetings, Communications Team, Worship Team, SWAG, and some Building Team meetings
- ✓ Visits to hospitals, homes, individual care phone calls, and one-on-one pastoral care, weddings, quinceañeros, and five baptisms
- ✓ Attended lunches, Bible studies, and special/seasonal events of our Latino and Hmong worship communities
- ✓ Attended the "Trunk or Treat" and "Family Day" events
- ✓ Represent ALC in the Ministry of the Synod's "La Mesa Latina"

A Note from Pastor Aida Muñiz (cont.)

Youth and Confirmation Class

Receiving 5K from The Siebert Foundation helped us launch our youth group programming called "S.W.A.G." (Saved with Amazing Grace). The program kicked off with a "Lock-In" youth event in late March, led by some of our Hmong leaders and me. ALC's Youth Director is Kou Thao. SWAG gathers every 3rd Saturday of the month.

During the fall, we began our Confirmation class, which is formed of eight students who will be confirmed around Pentecost Sunday 2027.

Worship & Technology

During 2025, some projects took priority over technology in worship. Nonetheless, we are still equipped with good technology to provide live worship services every Sunday. We are currently livestreaming the unified and special services, and some Hmong worship services. Still, one of the goals is to include our worship services in English and Spanish as part of our livestream offerings. For that, we would have 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. During 2025, we let the congregation know about this need, yet there were no volunteers; also, we have talked of a stipend possibility. Due to the year's complexities and other priorities, it had to be tabled. It is important that we livestream our services, as some of our disciples who are temporarily "homebound" have been requesting it. Also, I know from previous experience that livestreaming services can be an effective evangelism effort. Right now, we are not using the screen, due to a situation with our projector, hopefully this will get fixed soon. Ascension is already a hybrid church, as most of our meetings are held online. Providing consistent online worship experiences every Sunday would be a very logical next step, especially if we already have the technology.

Moving forward

Recently the Leadership Council asked me to put together a Pastoral Support Team. This team will serve as a sounding board for the pastor and give counsel to the pastor when necessary. In addition, annually and with the pastor, they will evaluate ministry goals and performance. The team members are retired Pastor Gail Brodersen-Heins and Johnny Vang.

Our constitution is in the process of being evaluated by the Constitution Team of our Synod. This team will collaborate with us in the effort to update our constitution to be one that fits our current needs and realities, and at the same time, on par with the recently updated synod constitution.

A Note From Pastor Aida Muñiz (cont.)

There are still many objectives. We must improve our communication, organizational structure, protocols, and systems that in turn will make our work more efficient. We are already working on all of those. Lay leadership has been key to all of this, so a HUGE THANKS to all of you. It takes time and effort, but remember, we are that body, joined and held by ligaments, formed by Ascension's historic legacy.

There is much work ahead, and I am confident that as we move forward, God will equip and guide us.

To God be all the glory!

In Christ,

Rev. Aida Muñiz



MINISTRY AREAS



PREPARING AND
STRENGTHENING



WORSHIP AND
GATHERING



YOUTH AND
FAMILY



SERVING AND
SENDING

Preparing & Strengthening Ministry

Leadership Council

Our leadership council welcomed four new members in September 2025, following a congregational vote!

The Leadership Council is:

Michelle Acevedo*
Cheryl Groth (President)
José Guerrero
Susie Hess (Secretary)
Charlie Kudy (Treasurer)
Ar Lee
Gao McCrary*
Pamela Moore*
Veronica Perez*
Laura Ruiz (Assistant Secretary)

Goals for 2025 include:

- Review of our constitution and bylaws for approval
- Continue to support ALC's ministries and community partners
- Steward our time, talents and treasures responsibility
- Grow engagement amongst disciples, friends, and our partners.
- Begin engaging in planning to celebrate Ascension's 175th anniversary in 2027!

* denotes a new member to our council!

2026 Planned Groups & Events

- Bible Study (monthly)
 - Contact: Jan Fox 262.281.1690
- AMIS (Ascension in Mission) (scheduled)
 - Contact: Jan Fox 262.281.1690
- Ladies Lunch (monthly)
 - Contact: Jan Fox 262.281.1690
- S.W.A.G. Youth Group (3rd Sat. of the month)
 - Contact: Kou Thao 414.378.2733
- Unified worship services @ 10:00am
 - 3rd Sunday of the month
- S.W.A.G. Youth Lock-In
 - Date: 3.28.26
 - Location: "Big Putts" and ALC
 - Contact: Kou Thao 414.378.2733
- Community Easter Egg Hunt
 - Date/Time: 4.11.26 @ 3:00pm
 - Location: TBD
 - Contact: Ar Lee 414.405.9202
- S.W.A.G. Family Grill Out
 - Date: 6.20.26
 - Location: ALC
 - Contact: Kou Thao 414.378.2733
- Church Picnic
 - Date: 8.1.26 or 8.8.26
 - Location: TBD
 - Contact: Jerry Vang 414.477.2997
- Egg Roll Fundraiser:
 - Date/Time: 9.26.26 – 9.27.26
 - Location: ALC
 - Contact: Lee Her 414.477.8941
- Trunk or Treat:
 - Date/Time: 10.24.26
 - Location: ALC Parking Lot
 - Contact: PangNha Vang 414.336.8276

Preparing & Strengthening Ministry

Building Team

During the past year, the Building Team has completed the following projects:

- Monitored Phase 2 of the upgrade to the building fire alarm system
- Monitored restoration of the amphitheater for damages caused by a flood in that room
- Managed change of insurance coverage from Church Mutual to Acuity
- Welcome four new nonprofit community partners: Walker's Point Youth & Family Center, Lutheran Social Services, the Milwaukee Gay Volleyball Association and Share Our Best Furniture Ministry, to achieve full occupancy of our 1300 building and campus!
- Finalized lease renewals for all current tenants except for Inner Beauty, which is scheduled for 2026
- Monitored and addressed unauthorized overnight parking in the church lot
- Address ongoing repairs for circuits and water leaks
- Registered with Faith In Place-Focus on Energy program to pursue financial incentives for upgrades and improvements that will provide future energy savings

The team will focus on parking-lot improvements, fire-alarm upgrades, west-entry door replacement, and full amphitheater restoration. Ascension's large, historic facility requires ongoing monitoring and repairs, while also providing space to partner with mission-aligned nonprofits and generate budget-supporting income.

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

Spring Cleanup!

A campus cleanup is being planned, and we are engaging our community partners!

Date: 5/9/26

Backup date: 5/16/26

Location: ALC Commons

Contact: José Guerrero

414.207.4217

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

Preparing & Strengthening Ministry

Stewardship

For 2026, 43 individuals have pledged—an increase of 20% over last year. While participation has grown, the total amount pledged is down slightly by 4%.

Encouragingly, in 2025, actual donations exceeded pledged amounts by 33%, resulting in a total ministry investment of \$186,000.

Stewardship, however, is about much more than financial giving. It is also about sharing our time and talents to strengthen the ministry and mission of Ascension. We encourage everyone to attend the upcoming Involvement Fair to discover ways to engage more deeply in the life of Ascension.

Grace Thomsen, Stewardship Team

**Endowment
Board Vacancy!**

**Be a part of
planning
Ascension's
long-term
future.**

**Contact Mark
Thomsen at
mthomsen_34@
hotmail.com**

Endowment Board

In 1954, Ascension's leaders established the Ascension Lutheran Church Endowment Board as a separate legal entity composed of Ascension disciples committed to our mission. Over time, members have contributed hundreds of thousands of dollars ("[God's] people faithfully brought in the contributions, tithes and dedicated gifts." 2 Chronicles 31:12). The fund balance now totals approximately \$3.043 million.

Board members include Jerry Vang; Kirsten Pezewski (treasurer); Chuck Kudy (secretary); Joan Semrad-Hutchinson; Laura Ruiz; Charlie Kudy; Cheryl Groth; and Mark Thomsen (president). With guidance from Robert W. Baird advisor Shawn Zoltak, the Board stewards and grows the Fund responsibly.

In 2025, the Board continued its \$100,000 annual contribution to Ascension's operating budget, granted \$5,000 to AMIS, and directed an additional \$100,000 toward retiring debt from "More Than A Roof."

Gifts to the Endowment Fund are warmly welcomed and faithfully put to work in Christ's service ("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

Worship & Gathering Ministry

Worship Planning

The Unified Worship Team meets monthly (virtually) to plan the Unified worship services held on the third Sunday of the month, with additional services for special occasions such as All Saints' Day, Christmas Eve, and Ash Wednesday. Our goal is to prepare a meaningful, trilingual service that reflects our English-, Spanish-, and Hmong-speaking communities.

Led by Pastor Aida Muñiz, the team includes: Sterling Biggers; Laura Ruiz; Ar Lee; and Jan Fox, our AMIS representative, who coordinates fellowship. We also collaborate with Roxanne Carloni, director of the Handbell Choir, and Gao McCrary, whose small group occasionally offers music in all three languages. Guest contributors sometimes join to share ideas.

Together, we plan the order of worship, music, and liturgy. Final materials are sent to Office Administrator Chuck Ellingson, who prepares the bulletin.

We look forward to worshipping with you!

Interested in Serving at Worship?

*We are always
welcoming those
who are interested
in greeting,
reading, ushering,
and preparing!*

*Church office:
414.645.2933*

*Jan Fox:
262.782.5680*

*Ar Lee:
414.405.9202*

*Pastor Aida:
414.645.2933*

Music

Handbell Choir:

Rehearses late September through mid-May and plays every 5–6 weeks, including Christmas, Easter, and special services. Rehearsals follow the 9:00am worship service, with performances often during unified worship services. The seven-member choir collaborates with Sterling Biggers and the House Band and selects music suited to its size. Recruitment efforts continue within our Hmong and Latino disciples.

Ascension House Band & Musicians:

The Ascension House Band, along with Latino and Hmong musicians, provides vibrant music in weekly worship.

Future Goal:

Hire a music coordinator to strengthen cross-cultural collaboration and expand musical offerings across the congregation

Worship & Gathering Ministry

Altar Guild & Sanctuary Care

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

- Changing the cloths as needed
- Preparing for communion
- Candles
- Advent wreath
- Sanctuary flowers – seasonal/special-event ordering
- Change banners, according to the church calendar posted in the sacristy
- Ordering lilies/poinsettias for Easter and Christmas seasons, as well as setting up and arranging flowers in front of the altar
- Prepare the sanctuary for Lent and Good Friday

In 2026, we are seeking additional members to help with these duties. Current members that are completing tasks listed above are Robert Graf, Laura Ruiz, Sue Kaschak, Ar Lee, and Lee Her. Contact: Roberta Graf 414.312.3754

Special Unified & Other Services

- **Maundy Thursday**
 - Date/Time: 4.2.26 @ 7pm
 - Location: 2812 W Wisc. Ave
- **Good Friday**
 - Date/Time: 4.3.26 @ 7pm
- **Easter Sunday**
 - Date/Time: 4.5.26 @ 10am
- **Backpack Blessing**
 - Date/Time: 8.30.26 @ 11:30am
- **Hunter's Blessing**
 - Date/Time: 9.13.26 @ 11:30am
- **God's Work, Our Hands Sunday**
 - Date/Time: 9.20.26 @ 10am
- **Día de los Muertos/All Saints' Day**
 - Date/Time: 11.1.26 @ 10am
- **Christmas Eve**
 - Date/Time: 12.24.26 @ 4pm
- **Hmong New Year**
 - Date/Time: 1.3.27 @ 10am

Youth & Family Ministry

S.W.A.G (Saved with Amazing Grace) Youth Group & Faith Formation

SWAG is the acronym for Saved With Amazing Grace. SWAG Youth Nights are on the third Saturday of each month from 6-9pm, unless told otherwise, for youth ages 13-17.

We do fellowship, play games, have dinner, and watch an episode of "The Chosen" series. If the month is a holiday month, we try to incorporate it into SWAG night, with a small devotion of the holiday, special games, like Jeopardy, and a movie.

We started SWAG Youth Night a little after the start of 2025 and plan to keep doing it in 2026. We even went on an outdoor trip to the Land of Natura in Wisconsin Dells in late July 2025. This year, we plan to have another outdoor trip in July (official date TBD).

If you would like to donate your time, talents, or treasures to the youth, feel free to talk to me or Pastor Aida.

Sunday school is at 11:30am.
Confirmation classes are also on Sundays at 1:00pm.

~ Kou Thao 414.378.2733



Serving & Sending Ministry

AMIS (Ascension in Mission)

AMIS was formed to sponsor a missionary. Over time, our focus expanded to support a variety of smaller organizations doing important work and in need of financial support.

This year we shared gifts with:

- Forward Scholars — \$2,500
- Hephatha Lutheran Church — \$900
- ELCA Texas Relief — \$750
- ELCA World Hunger — \$3,250
- Greater Milwaukee Synod — \$2,000
- Outreach for Hope — \$1,250
- Bright Stars of Bethlehem — \$2,500

We are grateful to Ascension's Endowment Fund for providing \$5,000 each year to support this work. Our fall mum sale and generous donations from members provide the rest of our funding.

We meet three times a year, following a shared meal, and would love to have you join us. Contact: Jan Fox 262.281.1690

Outreach & Evangelism

We are looking for folks who are interested in setting up three community activities per year to welcome new faces to ALC and engage current ones!

Bring your ideas and let's continue to bring our community together!

Contact Pastor Aida!

Communications

The Communication Team continued to meet about once a month in 2025, focused on maintaining our newsletter, website, social media pages, and coordinating with the office on email blasts! We also added an annual "Impact Report" to be shared with those who have made mission investments through the year.

In 2026, we will continue to meet monthly, focused on the same tasks as above; however, we are also working on "Connection Cards," for disciples and visitors alike, to be featured in our pews, designing signage for our building, and enhancing our social media.

We meet for an hour about ten times a year via Google Meet and would love to have you share any communication ideas with us! Contact Charlie if you are interested at 414.758.4079.

Cindy Jackson, Charlie Kudy, Ar Lee, Susie Hess & Gail Brodersen-Heins

Get Connected with ALC MKE!

Scan the code to sign up for our newsletter, check out upcoming events, or to learn more about our community partners!



Financial Summary

	<u>Through 1.30.26 Goal</u>	<u>1.30.26 Actual</u>	<u>2026 Budget</u>	<u>2025 Actual</u>	<u>2024 Actual</u>
Endowment	\$ 8,300.00	\$ 8,333.33	\$ 100,000.00	\$ 112,825.96	\$ 99,999.96
Donations	\$ 15,770.00	\$ 34,967.02	\$ 190,000.00	\$ 186,054.11	\$ 204,495.06
Building Rental	\$ 16,123.98	\$ 16,516.18	\$ 194,264.86	\$ 158,147.72	\$ 132,980.03
Misc	\$ 1,879.95	\$ (313.08)	\$ 22,750.00	\$ 18,238.37	\$ 33,476.92
Roof Donations	\$ 1,245.00	\$ 3,243.00	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 129,776.00	\$ 82,916.00
TOTAL REVENUE	\$ 43,318.93	\$ 62,746.45	\$ 522,014.86	\$ 605,042.16	\$ 553,867.97

Administration	\$ 23,502.49	\$ 28,288.27	\$ 283,162.56	\$ 275,344.42	\$ 318,013.03
Ministry	\$ 2,921.60	\$ 2,655.19	\$ 35,200.00	\$ 32,641.43	\$ 42,606.66
Building	\$ 12,574.50	\$ 23,760.62	\$ 151,500.00	\$ 169,043.53	\$ 156,740.43
Utilities	\$ 5,650.64	\$ 9,127.18	\$ 68,080.00	\$ 73,022.14	\$ 63,811.67
Addtl Roof Prinp. Pmt	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 100,000.00	\$ 45,000.00
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ 44,649.23	\$ 63,831.26	\$ 537,942.56	\$ 650,051.52	\$ 626,171.79

Difference	\$ (1,330.30)	\$ (1,084.81)	\$ (15,927.70)	\$ (45,009.36)	\$ (72,303.82)
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Outstanding Debt				\$ 264,011.62	\$ 418,167.32
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Ascension disciples, friends, and partners,

As a congregation, we set out an ambitious goal in 2025 to cut our deficit (a loss) by 44% in one year from \$72K to \$33K. While we did not achieve that goal, we reduced our deficit by 38%. This was accomplished through continued mission investment (giving) by our disciples, renewing and expanding community partnerships and use of our building, and continued support from the Endowment Board for budget support.

Here's what is proposed in the 2026 budget:

- Increased investments in ministry activities (Youth & Family, AMIS, Outreach and Evangelism, and Music)
- 25% increase in rental revenues, thanks to expanded and renewed partnerships
- Continued investment on our campus, and reduction of our roof debt
- Decreasing our deficit (a loss) to \$15,000 (If achieved, we cut this by 79% in three years!)

As we turn to 2026 and look ahead to the future in celebrating our 174th year of ministry, we yet again set out on our mission to serve as a congregation that serves its community **“Rooted”** on Milwaukee's southside by throwing open our doors to ALL our neighbors, and **“Rising”** to the challenge by proudly proclaiming "HERE WE STAND!".

Charlie Kudy, Treasurer