



the church of the ascension

a communion of faith in the episcopal church
Denver, Colorado

Parish Profile 2011

Introduction

The Episcopal Church of the Ascension is a 107 year-old, well-established church, centrally located two miles southeast of Denver's city center. With its beautiful Gothic architecture tucked away in the shady 7th Avenue Historic District, Ascension is one of Denver's longstanding Episcopal churches, a cherished and welcoming place both for "native" families and newcomers to the city. We come together to nurture our deep spiritual growth as we worship God in an intimate community setting.

In the fall of 2011, Church of the Ascension is embarking on a search for our next rector. After nine years at our parish, the Rev. James Harlan was called away to lead the Episcopal Church of Bethesda-by-the-Sea in Palm Beach, Florida. We are now seeking a new pastor who can energize and inspire our congregation with a heart of wisdom, compassion, and service, through the next chapter of our parish life together.

Formed in September 2011, the Ascension Search Committee has worked hard to discern the parish's needs and aspirations, through a comprehensive survey of approximately 100 households, and to identify strong potential candidates to help meet this vision. We are accepting rector applications from October 15 - December 1, 2011. We hope that this portfolio will help potential candidates to understand our parish better and to determine a possible call here.



Who We Are

The Church of the Ascension is a communion of faith, bound together in our worship, fellowship, and ministry; uplifted by the Holy Spirit; and committed to sharing and growing in Christ's love.

Ascension is a parish of 150 regularly attending households and more than 350 members. Located between the sedate Denver Country Club and jazzy Colfax Avenue, we are in a neighborhood with a mix of established families and young adult households of different income levels. Our intergenerational community is spread across the decades, with a similar percentage of parishioners in their 20s and 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s, and above. Families play a major part in church life – more than a quarter of us have children who regularly attend Sunday school and other youth programs.



We worship in a broad Episcopalian worship style centered in its historic liturgical and musical traditions. Our congregation highly values our Sunday Eucharist worship service as the church's primary strength – a combination of strong, Gospel-centered preaching, Spirit-filled ritual, and beautiful music blending timeless choral works with contemporary arrangements.

Most of the congregation first came to Ascension because of its clergy and style of worship, but it is our sense of community that keeps us coming

back. In contrast to larger parishes, our members know each other's names and often mingle long after the service to catch up with friends and neighbors. In the words of one member, the church exemplifies "a dual sense of reverence and community."

We are a neighborhood church. Over two-thirds of us live within three miles of the parish, and 80% within five miles. Given our central location to urban Denver, there is a steady stream of newcomers, and over 60% of us have joined in the last ten years, during the last rector's tenure.

We have a committed staff consisting of the rector, a part-time administrator, a youth director, a deacon, a part-time music director, and one assistant priest. Our vestry is strong and highly committed, overseeing the task of managing the church's \$400,000 per year budget and providing guidance to the many lay committees serving our parish ministries.

We believe in the "middle way" of the historic Anglican Communion, as a church body comprised of a wide variety of perspectives. We may not all agree, but our dialogue informs each other on different aspects of God and the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives. Our survey revealed that even within our parish, we have broad preferences about worship styles and musical traditions. As the face of Denver changes, we are a community that seeks to welcome and accept all people as we listen and respond to the call of God in our lives.

Who We Are Seeking

A Christian community must do as Jesus did..... Its attraction must lie in the radiance cast by the love of brothers (and sisters). -Jean Vanier

What kind of a leader will mount the charge for Ascension as we embark on this bold, new frontier of the middle 21st century? We are seeking a rector of great personal faith who is approachable, willing to listen, and easily connects with people. Our rector should teach and inspire us with strong, thoughtful preaching skills as well as serve as a spiritual guide to lead our Christian life. The person should have a sense of humor, compassionate heart, and gift for pastoral care. We are especially looking for someone who can continue to build and inspire Ascension's younger membership and support the growth of children's, family, and young adult ministries. Our rector should value Ascension's current strengths in traditional liturgy and music. It is also important to us to have an effective manager and leader skilled in developing a sound plan for church growth and stewardship.

What We Hope to Be

As we faced the challenge of our rector's departure, our self-study identified our aspirations and vision for the future - building on the best of the first century of our existence and looking ahead to the Ascension of tomorrow. One person said it is "not enough to say we want to spread the gospel, but in order to do so we will have to serve and grow in ways we never thought possible."

In our parish forums and surveys, parishioners repeatedly voiced the following hopes and aspirations for the next chapter in our life together:

- Attract a growing number of young families and young adults through supportive ministries and fellowship, including a vibrant Christian youth education program.
- Maintain and build upon Ascension's core strengths in its traditional liturgical worship and outstanding music
- Maintain a strong financial footing and management practices to support the growth of Ascension's ministries
- Expand Ascension's outreach and pastoral care into the places of need and suffering in our community and world
- Continue to make the Gospel relevant to people and their unique 21st century challenges through worship and adult spiritual formation, bringing God's purpose, love, and light into an increasingly secular world
- Continue to foster a sense of parish fellowship in Sunday worship and throughout the week
- Move forward as a congregation enthusiastically committed to hearing and responding to the call of God in our lives, led by an inspiring and loving rector with strong preaching and pastoral skills

We look to the future with hope and confidence that God's hand is guiding us. This step, as with those of the past, will be anchored by prayer, thoughtful consideration, and the best of intentions.

Worship

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;
worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness. - Psalms 29:2

Worship is at the core of our community life, a sacred time of ritual, peace, and replenishment inspiring us to be the presence of Christ in the world. We have two services on Sunday mornings at 8 and 10 a.m., which use Rite II language. Most Ascension parishioners prefer a blended Episcopal tradition of historic liturgical worship with modern renewal and contemplative elements. Holy Eucharist is at the center of the service. We incorporate children's sermons and intergenerational worship settings from time to time, as well as a weekly healing prayer team ministry for those suffering or in need. A full complement of trained lectors, altar servers, and acolytes symbolize the shared responsibility between rector and laity.

Music is key to Sunday services, with a full choir performing hymns, psalms, and choral arrangements at 10 a.m. Communion music alternates between traditional anthems and guitar-led praise music or contemporary hymns. Ninety percent of parishioners say that music is either "very important" or "important" to their worship experience.

Weekday services take place in our beautifully intimate chapel and include a Eucharistic liturgy at noon on Wednesday and an evening spirituality gathering, which uses the Daily Office. We offer additional services during Christmas, Lent, Holy Week, and Easter.

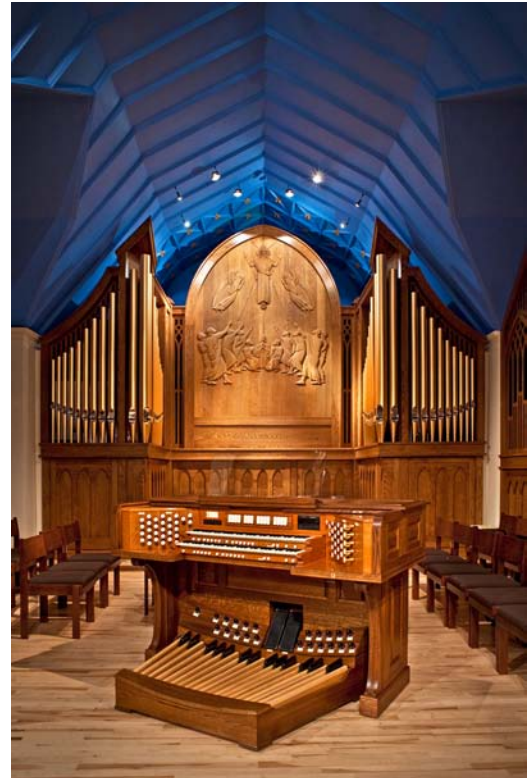


Music

It is good to give thanks to the LORD,
and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High; - Psalm 92:1

Music is an integral part of Ascension's liturgical and spiritual life, and the congregation enjoys and has come to expect diverse musical expression at a high quality standard. At both Sunday Services we have formal music programs with a wide variety of opportunities to share our musical gifts in praise and thanksgiving, including participation in ensembles such as:

- *Adult Choir* - This mixed chorus sings at our 10 a.m. Sunday Eucharist from September through June and provides special music for holiday services.
- *Youth Choir* - Open to first through fifth grades, this choir gives our children an opportunity to share their musical gifts, develop confidence in choral singing, and have fun!
- *Cherub Choir* - Open to grades Pre-K through kindergarten, this choir rehearses briefly during the 10 a.m. service in coordination with the Sunday School's Godly Play curriculum.
- *Praise!* and *Celebration!* - These two smaller ensembles present contemporary Christian music ranging in style from acoustic folk ballads to upbeat amplified songs during the administration of Communion. *Praise!* rehearses every Thursday evening from 6:30-7:00PM and *Celebration!* rehearses in conjunction with the Adult Choir.
- Ninety-five percent of the Ascension congregation says they prefer either solely traditional music or a mix of traditional and contemporary music.



Throughout the week, we also invite in the wider community for musical rehearsals and recitals. With the completion of renovations and installation of a new Patrick J. Murphy & Associates organ in 2009, our church sanctuary has become a sought-after site for concerts due to its superior acoustics, intimacy, and aesthetic. Youth and adult ensembles making use of our facilities include the Colorado Youth Pipe Band, Colorado Youth Symphony Orchestra, and Sounds of Children, as well as violin students from the University of Denver's Lamont School of Music. The Young Artists Program of Opera Colorado also offers a matinee recital during the course of the year.

Ascension's organ was featured as the cover story in the March 2011 issue of *The American Organist* magazine, and we make this highly regarded instrument available to young organists for practice and lessons during the summer months. The success of our organ installation and sanctuary renovation has ensured that our legacy of fine church music will continue for many years to come.

Parish Life and Ministries

Although Ascension is a relatively small church, we actively participate in more than 15 ministry groups serving Christ, the greater community, and each other. Drawing from all age groups in the parish, our ministries reflect our diverse talents and interests.



Pastoral Care

Both clergy and laity make great efforts to share the love and light of Christ with all members of Ascension community. Priests, deacons, and lay Eucharistic ministers make special visits to support parish members who are homebound, hospitalized, or living in nursing homes. Ascension Spiritual Director Al Starkey, trained in Ignatian spiritual formation practices, is available to meet during the week with church members seeking to deepen their spiritual lives or in need of Christian support. The clergy also works with parishioners on an individual basis to support pastoral needs such as marriage preparation or mentorship in discerning a call to ordination.

Hospitality and Fellowship

Ascension's many Hospitality and Fellowship ministries create a welcoming presence and community for parishioners. Every week a different member of the congregation supplies a breakfast coffee hour after the 10 a.m. service to church members, providing a time for conversation and community. The church celebrates various community gatherings throughout the year, including the Shrove Tuesday Supper that fills our parish hall with delicious smells of pancakes and bacon and the Sunday School kick off picnic in September. A volunteer committee publishes a quarterly "Parish Post" that updates the congregation on parish news



and relevant articles about our Christian life together. The Grub Club is a monthly gathering of young adults and young families, which takes place at a local inexpensive restaurant. These church activities, among others, help nurture our sense of Christian fellowship outside the Sunday worship service.



Outreach

But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind.
-Luke 14:12-14

All Ascension members are encouraged to develop a heart for stewardship, manifesting God's love beyond Ascension. Our Outreach Committee meets once a month to identify community needs as well as to recruit and organize parish volunteers for specific projects. We act as stewards to the least, the last, and the lost.

In response to a need for quality childcare for families and single parents struggling to make ends meet, we started Bright Star Early Learning Center in 1999, a pre-school and day-care program. Over the last decade, the happy sounds of Bright Star's children have filled the empty rooms of the church building during the week. Over time, Bright Star has evolved into an independent organization, with a fund that offers financial aid to parents with high need. Bright Star not only serves some of our own church families, but it welcomes the wider community into our facilities too.

Ascension also works hard to provide relief to those suffering and in need beyond our immediate neighborhood through various outreach programs:

- On Loaves and Fishes Sunday each year, we collect hundreds of pounds of food to deliver to Metro CareRing, a non-profit emergency food pantry for needy families.
- We provide both volunteer services, such as laundry and clothing processing, and financial support to the St. Francis Center serving Denver's homeless population
- We support the Colorado Haiti Project and the Pine Ridge Indian School. In addition to our financial support, Ascension has sent work teams to perform services on site.
- We offer emergency assistance from our food pantry to people in need who walk into the church.
- We also have a "meals on wheels" ministry that provides meals upon request to ill or homebound parish members.
- We give to Episcopal Relief and Development, St. Clare's Kitchen, Colorado Food Bank, Fleece Navidad and the Ascension Request for Assistance Funds.



In addition, many of our members are engaged in compassionate outreach through their lives of service both professionally and as volunteers in the wider Denver community.

Christian Education

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly
as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom. -Colossians 3:16

Youth and Children's Ministries

Ascension's youth and children's ministries nurture parish children in a vibrant and safe community where they can share and grow in Christ's love. Led by youth director Rachel Patrick, who joined Ascension in the spring of 2011, and a volunteer coordinator, we seek to create an engaging, meaningful experience of faith and fellowship for our youngest members. Our self-study confirmed that growing and expanding programs for children and youth is our members' highest priority.

During Sunday worship services, pre-kindergarten through junior high children experience a faith formation curriculum that changes depending on the season and youth discipleship needs. The younger children enjoy our beautiful "Godly Play" room and activities. Once a month, the entire congregation worships together in an all-ages service that fully and visibly incorporates the youth of Ascension into our worship life.



Other youth ministries include the youth and cherub choirs and the acolyte program. Teens also have the opportunity to participate in Epicenter, Ascension's youth group. In the past, Ascension has sponsored youth mission trips and a variety of children's activities. Looking to the future, we hope to become more involved with the youth offerings of the Diocese of Colorado, including Genesis and Quest. We are also planning local service opportunities within our diocese and neighborhoods.

Adult Education

Adult Christian education ministries enhance our deeper understanding and spiritual growth in the Christian faith. Offerings include a Friday Men's Bible Study group that utilizes the Sunday lectionary to examine and discuss our core beliefs. A weekly Women's Bible Study group also uses the Holy Scriptures for the upcoming Sunday to understand God's message to our Christian ancestors and to us today. Monthly spirituality sessions invite parishioners to learn and practice diverse spiritual disciplines and share individual experiences to improve their relationships with God. Our newest adult education program, Deep Waters, invites members seeking confirmation and renewal to a ten-week educational program about the core tenets of faith.





Facilities

Church Complex

Located at the corner of 6th Avenue and Gilpin Street, Ascension's beautiful, historic facilities offer a traditional and welcoming setting for our service to God. Adorned by stained glass windows and a wood-carved screen above the altar depicting the Ascension scene, the newly renovated sanctuary provides a sacred space capable of holding up to 300 worshippers. All Saint's Chapel serves as our weekday worship setting, seating up to 80 people. The Henry S. Foster Educational Wing boasts twelve large classrooms and serves our Sunday school, youth group, nursery, and Bright Star preschool programs. A large parish hall and kitchen provide a central area for community gatherings after worship and during the week.

Rectory

Built in 1907 and located next door to the church complex, the 2,155 square foot rectory features four bedrooms and two full baths, as well as an 816 square foot finished basement. The rectory is situated in the 7th Avenue Historic District, one of the most desirable neighborhoods in the city, several blocks from the spacious Cheesman Park. It is also located within the geographical boundaries of some of the city's finest public schools: Bromwell Elementary, Morey Middle School, and East High School.



Finances and Stewardship

Ascension completed 2010 within our approximately \$400,000 parish budget and met all of our financial priorities, establishing a solid financial baseline for 2011. Through August 2011, the budget is balanced. The parish budget pays staff, maintains our facilities, supports our ministries, and provides for contributions to the Diocese of Colorado.

Each fall our stewardship committee takes on responsibility for encouraging members to support the mission of our parish and our ministries both financially and through parishioners giving time and talent. Parishioners positively responded to our 2011 campaign by pledging significantly more than previous years. As a result, we were able to expand many of our programs, especially our youth and music ministries. This increased giving during a difficult economy demonstrates our commitment to supporting the Ascension ministries.

Parish finances are overseen by a paid accountant, treasurer, finance committee, vestry, and by the completion of parish audits by outside auditors.



A Brief Church History



In April 1904, when Denver was a rowdy, prosperous city after the late 19th century mineral boom, Mrs. Thomas Ward started a mission in a tent to meet the need for a neighborhood Sunday School. In 1909, Arlington Mission outgrew its original quarters and expanded to a vacant plot six blocks away, at the corner of Sixth and Gilpin streets where a temporary \$350 chapel was built.

From these early days, a century of church members' loving hard work and dedication has yielded Ascension's beautiful neo-Gothic

buildings of today. In 1909, a small brick church was built to seat 100 people. In 1959, a two-story wing was added to meet the demand for classroom and meeting space. In 2009, the sanctuary was remodeled and a custom-built A. J. Murphy organ installed.

Our history is not just our buildings, but in our people and efforts to serve the community. In 1953, Ascension sponsored a new mission at Christ Church in Castle Rock, Colorado. Our rector and curate served alternately there for three years until the mission became its own thriving parish. In 1960, Ascension rector Fr. Edwin Thayer was called to be Bishop of Colorado. In 1976, we helped start St. Martin in the Fields in Aurora. In 1999, we started Bright Star Early Learning Center in response to a need for high quality child care in the neighborhood.

In the 107 years since our humble beginning, Ascension has had only ten rectors. Our recent ones have been Rev. James Harlan, Rector, 2002–2011, Rev. James Short, Rector, 1980-2001, Rev. Robert Burrows, 1972-1979. We are proud to be a church of continuity and commitment –a parish with deep roots and an exciting future.



About Denver

Denver is situated on the high plains at the base of the Rocky Mountains. Moderate temperatures, low humidity, and abundant sunshine provide an ideal climate for year-round activities. The area has more days of sunshine annually than San Diego or Miami.

Winter storms are normally short-lived, and snow melts rapidly. However the nearby mountains and ski resorts receive significantly more snow, allowing residents to enjoy the best of both worlds—a mild climate for hiking, biking, and a variety of outdoor activities in the summer, as well as snow skiing, snowboarding, and other mountain activities.

Metro Denver's cost of living remains affordable compared to California or East Coast cities, as well as Chicago, Minneapolis, or Portland. Colorado's focus on low taxes, coupled with the region's high household incomes, has kept the state's cost of living at or near the national average, but well below many other major cities.

Denver is truly a sports city, with the fans and facilities to prove it as well as professional baseball, basketball, football, and soccer teams. In the past 15 years new facilities have been constructed for the area's major professional franchises. More than 16 million fans attend sporting events in the Mile High City.



Culture abounds in Denver—a place for energetic minds. The area's diverse population supports culture through the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD), a unique funding system for venues such as The Denver Performing Arts Center, the Denver Art Museum, and the Denver Museum of Nature & Science. A favorite summertime activity is catching a concert at Red Rocks Amphitheater, a world-famous facility in the foothills of the Rockies.

Biographies

Rev. Bob Davidson, Interim Rector

The Rev. Bob Davidson started as Interim Rector at the Church of the Ascension in August 2011. Father Bob is an Episcopal priest and professional counselor, currently employed in client service work for the Sawaya Law Firm in Denver. He has most recently served on the staff of St. Bartholomew's in Estes Park and has worked professionally in public schools, hospitals, and child protection agencies. Rev. Davidson expressed excitement at his new position at Ascension, "Churches, just like individuals and families, experience transitions in life. My prayer is that each of us will find God's presence in this change and realize the importance of our brothers and sisters in Christ."

Rev. Cassandra Strotheide, Associate Rector

Mother Cass has served Ascension as an assisting priest since July of 2010. She is a bi-vocational priest, also working as a microbiologist at Children's Hospital during the week. After receiving a M.Div in 2005, she began her ordained ministry as a deacon and curate at St. Matthew's in Parker where she served for several years. Cass was the priest-in-charge at All Saints in Northwest Denver for 18 months, shepherding the small congregation through the painfully difficult decision to close the parish. Her opportunities as a supply priest throughout the Diocese have given her an appreciation for the rich diversity among Episcopal churches and worshippers.

Rev. Bobbie Girardin, Deacon

The Rev. Bobbie Girardin serves as Deacon at Church of the Ascension. She focuses our congregation on outreach issues and opportunities to serve the world, especially the needy and the poor. Since her ordination as a vocational deacon in 1999, her primary ministry during the week has taken place at a battered women's shelter. She has been part of the Ascension community since 2002.

Greg Larson, Organist and Director of Music Ministries

Greg Larsen has served as Organist and Director of Music Ministries at the Church of the Ascension since September 2005. Greg has an extensive background in the music of the Episcopal Church after serving large parishes in the Twin Cities area prior to his relocation to Denver in 2002. He served on both the Liturgical Commission and Youth Commission of the Diocese of Minnesota, and was elected to membership in the Anglican Association of Musicians. Greg holds a B.S. degree in Music Education from the University of Minnesota, an M.A. in Arts Education from the University of Montana, and pursued an earlier graduate degree program in Arts Administration at Indiana University.

Rachel Patrick, Youth and Children's Ministry Coordinator

Rachel Patrick graduated from Bob Jones University in 2006 with a Bachelor of Arts in English and minors in Writing and Bible. She is the middle of twelve children, ages 37 to 6, and has ten nieces and nephews. She is thrilled to be a part of the team at Ascension helping to develop an exciting and vibrant community for children and youth.