

THE  
CHURCH  
OF THE  
ASCENSION

*New York*



PARISH PROFILE

THE  
CHURCH  
OF THE  
ASCENSION

*in the City of New York*



PARISH PROFILE

Fifth Avenue at Tenth Street  
New York, New York 10011  
[www.ascensionnyc.org](http://www.ascensionnyc.org)



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# Introduction



This parish profile was assembled in the first half of 2013 by members of the search committee of The Church of the Ascension with a great deal of help from vestry members and other parishioners. A parish questionnaire provided basic statistics and broad-based attitudes that were complemented and developed in two well-attended round table discussions. In addition, the search committee carried out a series of interviews with lay leadership, committee chairpersons, and administrative personnel to find out about the current functions, prospects, and future needs of people involved in the daily workings of the parish. We hope and believe that this profile gives an accurate portrait of The Church of the Ascension's past and current state, and that it will provide a proper blueprint for engaging a new rector to lead us into a spiritually rich future in the service of God.



## Our Mission



Ascension is a welcoming, diverse, and inclusive community of people who gather to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ, to give praise and thanks to God through the beauty of worship, and to love and serve God and our neighbors.



## Our Vision



As followers of Christ, we will give praise and thanks to God through

- ✠ The celebration of our beautiful Episcopal liturgy, bringing ourselves into closer communion with God and each other.
- ✠ The preaching of God's Word to encourage us to live out our faith in our daily lives and explore new paths on our spiritual journeys.
- ✠ The expression of our faith and love through glorious organ and choral music.
- ✠ The inspiration of our magnificent historic church building.



Nourished in spirit, we will love and serve God and our neighbors by

- ✠ Caring for each other in times of crisis and need; giving comfort to those who are suffering or in distress, and to those less fortunate.
- ✠ Offering our hands and opening our hearts to visitors, seekers, inquirers, and newcomers and welcoming them warmly into our midst.
- ✠ Expanding opportunities for learning, study, communal prayer, and worship that will build fellowship and nurture spiritual development.
- ✠ Discerning the gifts of our parishioners and opening new avenues of service.
- ✠ Pledging with renewed commitment our generous support of the church.
- ✠ Being faithful custodians of our buildings and responsible stewards of our resources, placing the church on solid financial footing.

Rejoicing in God's abundant gifts, we will proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ by

- ✠ Sharing and declaring our Christian faith, speaking with currency and relevance to contemporary hearts and minds.
- ✠ Going beyond the walls of our church to seek out and attend to the spiritual needs of our neighbors.
- ✠ Reaching out to organizations in the surrounding community to build bridges of mutual support.
- ✠ Becoming fertile soil for growth in the love of Christ, and taking our place as a beacon of Christian discipleship in New York City.





## Our History



The history of The Church of the Ascension is one of worship, service, evangelism, and vision. It reflects the parish's openness to change in the face of the developments that have taken place in the 186 years since its founding. The first rector, the Rev. Manton Eastburn, was a leader of the evangelical movement. He established the original church in 1827 on Canal Street just east of Broadway "to proclaim... living, personal evangelical faith." When that building was destroyed by fire in 1839, the vestry made the bold decision to rebuild the church at its present site on Fifth Avenue and 10th Street. It was to be the first church on Fifth Avenue, built when Fifth Avenue was nothing more than a dirt road terminating at 23rd Street. At the same time, the rector purchased land for the rectory directly behind where the chancel wall was to be located. This had the dual purpose

of providing a home for the rector, and forcing the architect to design a shallow chancel so that, as Dr. Eastburn insisted, there “would be no room for High Church doings.” The simple interior was unadorned except for amber windows, four of which still remain today in the clerestory. The cornerstone was laid on March 19, 1840, and the church was consecrated on November 4, 1841.

Social concerns were at the forefront of Ascension’s activities during this period. Between 1843 and 1859, parishioners donated the extraordinary sum of \$225,000 for outreach purposes, when the regular annual budget was no more than \$10,000. Funds were given to such causes as famine relief in Ireland, aid for struggling churches in Liberia, and establishing and maintaining the Five Points Day School, which provided food, clothing, and education to the city’s poorest children. In 1888, the women of the parish set up the St. Agnes Nursery, the first day care program in New York City, for the children of working mothers.

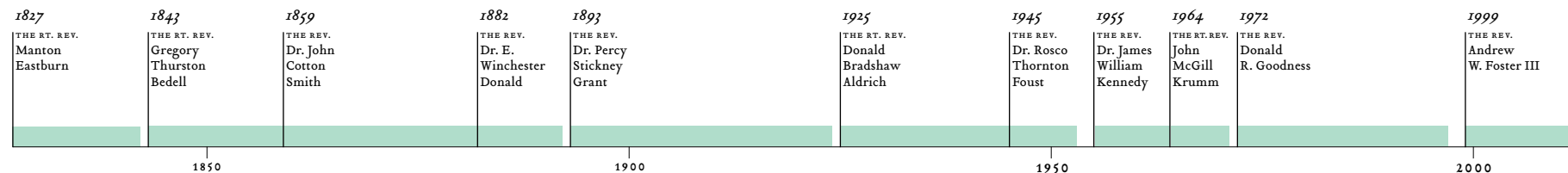
The move to Fifth Avenue proved prescient when, in the late 19th century, the area became a fashionable neighborhood for artists, writers, and wealthy New Yorkers, such as August Belmont, William B. Astor, Frederick de

Peyster, and William C. Rhinelander, all of whom were members. Between 1885 and 1889, the bleak, bare interior of the church was remodeled to include much of the lively decoration we see today. Galleries on the north and south aisles were removed and the chancel was redesigned.

Even as the remodeling of the church was taking place, the demographics of the neighborhood were changing again, as wealthy New Yorkers moved farther uptown. In 1893, the Rev. Percy Stickney Grant took the radical step of eliminating the pew rental system that had always been in place, making Ascension a parish of free pews that relied on voluntary giving. After the stock market crash in 1929, the Rev. Donald B. Aldrich proposed that the church be kept open full time to allow homeless men to sleep in its pews. Ascension was the first church to keep its doors open at all hours during the Depression, a policy that remained in place until 1966.

In recent years, The Church of the Ascension has continued to respond to the needs of the community. The Rev. Donald Goodness made Ascension a welcoming place of prayer, worship, and outreach to the gay community during the AIDS crisis in the 1980s. On September 11, 2001, the Rev. Andrew Foster opened the church for prayer, and

## RECTORS OF THE PARISH





offered a place of worship to stunned and shaken New Yorkers as they streamed uptown fleeing the World Trade Center disaster.

While Ascension remains a valued resource for the surrounding community, we need to build upon our legacy of service to others and to fulfill our birthright as one of the cardinal parishes in the Diocese of New York by playing a larger role in the full body of the Episcopal Church. Our history is a source of inspiration that, we hope, serves to motivate us to a greater level of Christian discipleship, faith, and service.





# Our Neighborhood



Located in the middle of the historic landmark district of Greenwich Village in New York City, The Church of the Ascension faces Fifth Avenue on the northwest corner of 10th Street with a connecting parish house that faces West 11th Street. The neighborhood's distinctive character comes from a mix of 19th-century brick townhouses and larger apartment buildings dating from the early to mid-20th century with quiet tree-lined side streets intersecting bustling avenues. Among New York's most charming areas architecturally, the Village is predictably desirable, and thus, expensive. Median household income is more than double that for the United States as a whole and property values are high even by New York City standards. Recent statistics show that more than 82% of Village residents over 25 years of age hold a bachelor's degree, and nearly 40% have graduate or

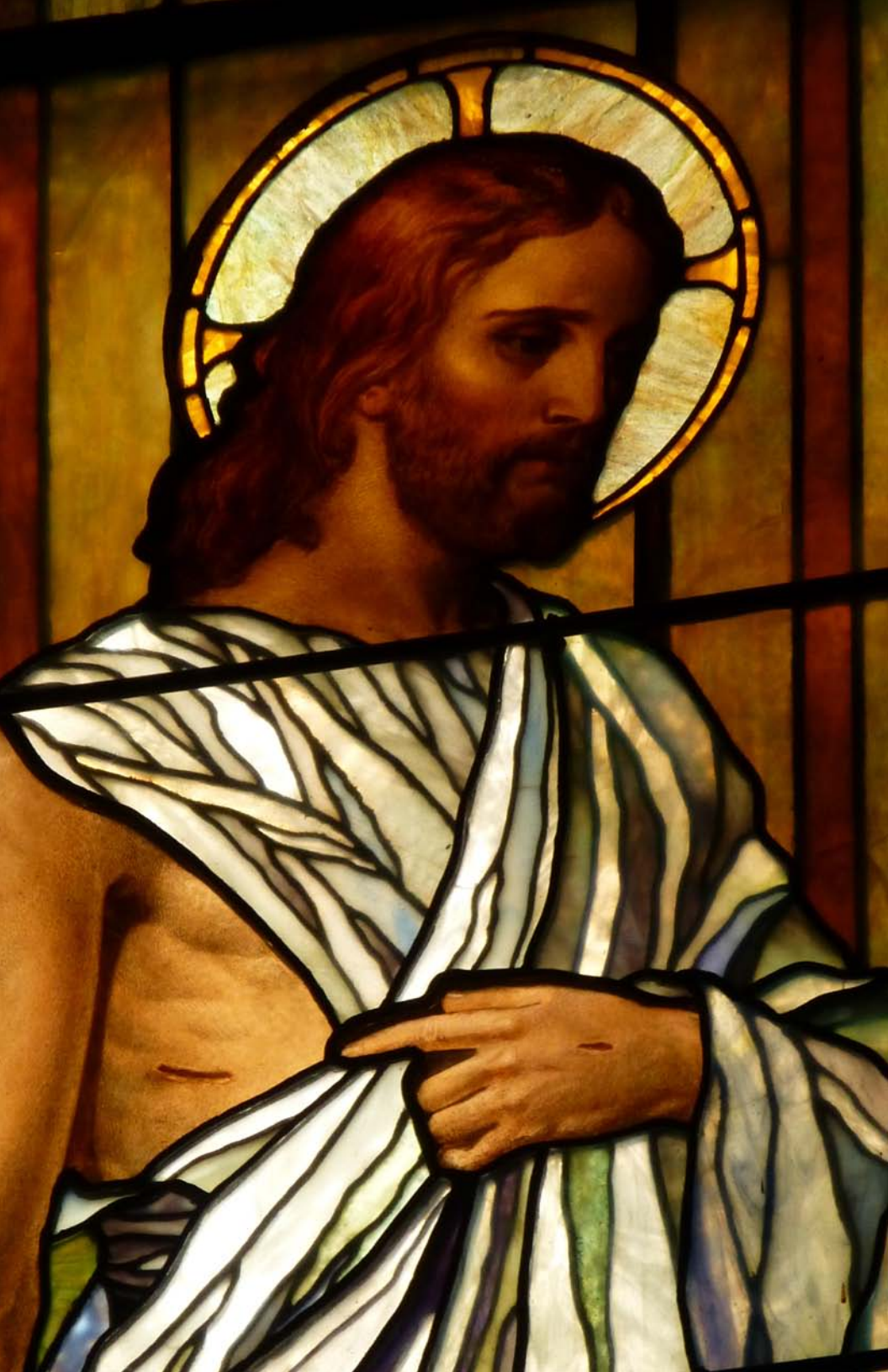


professional educations. Four major institutions of higher learning are located here: New York University, The New School University, the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, a division of Yeshiva University, and the Cooper Union.

Despite these statistics, our neighbors are by no means all wealthy. In fact, there are relatively low income residents in the area known as Community Board 2, which includes the Village as well as Chinatown, Little Italy, the Meatpacking District, and Soho. New York’s neighborhood landscape changes quickly from block to block, and the need for programs such as Ascension’s Food Pantry serves as a strong reminder of the varying levels of income and opportunity in our immediate area.

New York City is a true mosaic in terms of human diversity with more than one third of residents foreign born. Over 100 languages are spoken within the boundaries of the Diocese of New York. The Village reflects this variety, though it has a larger percentage of white residents and a higher average age than the city as a whole. Our neighborhood has traditionally been home to a large lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender population, and the LGBT community is well integrated into the fabric of the area. It should also be noted that, while official statistics are based on residents, Greenwich Village, with its strong business community, shopping, restaurants, theaters, and active nightlife, draws huge numbers of people from outside the neighborhood at all hours of the day and night. One final set of statistics that is particularly relevant to our congregation shows that fewer than 10 percent of Greenwich Village homes include a child under the age of 18, and well more than half the residents are single.

We are one of five Episcopal Churches along 10th Street, which are, from east to west: St. Mark’s in the Bowery, Grace Church, Ascension, St. John’s in the Village (Waverly Place and 11th Street), and The Church of St. Luke in the Fields (on Hudson Street).



## Ascension's Properties



The beautiful historic Church of the Ascension is beloved by our parishioners and has become a destination spot for visitors to New York City. The building is one of the earliest churches designed by the English-born architect Richard Upjohn. The interior in the American Renaissance style dates to the mid-1880's remodeling by McKim, Mead, & White under the direction of Stanford White. The centerpiece of the design is the monumental mural by John LaFarge, *The Ascension of Our Lord*, painted in 1887-88. Louis St. Gaudens, brother of Augustus Saint-Gaudens, sculpted the pair of high-relief angels over the altar, and David Maitland Armstrong created the mosaic angels flanking either side of the reredos. The church is also graced by a series of beautiful stained glass windows designed variously by LaFarge, Armstrong, Tiffany Studios, and J. Alden Weir, among others. In 1957, the Municipal

Art Society and the New York Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians named The Church of the Ascension as nationally important and worthy of preservation because of its architectural value, sculpture, stained glass, and paintings. In 1988, the church was declared a National Historic Landmark.

Under the leadership of our most recent rector, Fr. Foster, extensive renovations to the church building were undertaken in 2009-10 to address longstanding problems caused by leaks in the roof and windows. At the same time, the new Manton Memorial Organ was installed. Our first worship service in the newly restored church took place on Christmas Eve 2010. The nave is spacious and seats up to 500, but has a feeling of warmth and intimacy not usually experienced in large churches. The choir stalls and organ consoles sit on a raised chancel where a moveable free-standing altar is placed for most services. The magnificent LaFarge mural adorns the west wall with the relatively small sanctuary at its base containing the main altar and surrounded by a communion railing. A smaller altar located at the front of the north aisle is used for services on weekdays and on Sunday at 9 a.m. and occasionally for funeral and memorial services. Columbaria are located in the narthex of the church and in our very intimate All Saints Chapel. The chapel is located through a door off the north aisle as are the sacristy and a corridor that leads to the parish hall. The chapel also has an entrance from Fifth Avenue.

The parish house on West 11th Street was built in 1888, also by McKim, Mead & White. The main public space is the parish hall, a handsome room that comfortably seats 75 for dinner. It was renovated in 1994 when air-conditioning and new lighting were installed. The parish hall is in constant use: for post-service fellowship, vestry meetings, Bible study and book club, AA meetings, music recitals, choir practice, our tutoring program, and even for services during very hot

weather. Outside groups sometimes utilize the space as well. The kitchen is in the finished basement, which is also used for storage, choir-robing and the Food Pantry closet. The upper floors (there is no elevator) provide offices for clergy and staff. The top floor includes an apartment for the sexton, who oversees the buildings' daily maintenance and security.

Ascension's rectory, directly behind the church, is a large Gothic Revival townhouse on West 10th Street. The six-story building from sub-basement to attic is believed to be New York's oldest brownstone townhouse in continuous residential use without subdivision or alteration. The ground floor houses our nursery and Sunday school as well as a meeting room for small groups. Garden spaces behind the church and fronting onto Fifth Avenue provide parishioners and visitors a place of respite and quiet reflection.

The upkeep of our properties, overseen by our buildings and grounds committee and two sub-committees for fine arts and gardens, is an ongoing responsibility and financial concern. Certain endowment funds have been specifically earmarked for general maintenance, care of the stained glass windows, and organ purposes, and major repairs and restoration in these areas have been recently completed. The rectory, however, has suffered from several decades of neglect and is badly in need of renovation. An urgent roof replacement was completed in 2012. Work on the interior is currently being planned and is projected for completion in 2014. Historically, the building has served as housing for our rector, and we expect that this will continue to be the case. At present, we are discerning how some space in the rectory might be repurposed so that it can be better integrated into parish life. We have organized a task force to look at options that are in keeping with our mission in the service of God, with an eye toward saving money, raising revenue, expanding outreach, and building fellowship.



## Today's Parish Family



Ascension's parish family is in many respects a reflection of our Greenwich Village neighborhood. It is largely made up of long-time New York area residents who come from diverse backgrounds. Like many New Yorkers, we are independent, open-minded, and inclusive. Yet we also value tradition, history, and a sense of continuity. For many of us, Ascension has been our home-away-from-home for years, and we cherish the relationships we have made there. As a congregation, we are deeply engaged in the life of our church.

Although our congregation thrives on all that the Village has to offer, fewer than half of parishioners actually reside in the neighborhood. In fact, nearly 20% live in other boroughs of New York City, including Brooklyn and Queens, while others are residents of nearby New Jersey and



Westchester County. The presence of this “commuter” crowd reflects the deep commitment and love that members have for the parish, as well as the reality of an urban environment in which the convenience of the location matters far less than the strength of the community.

An outstanding characteristic of our congregation that was revealed in our self-study survey is that we are a very well educated group: 62% of parishioners hold graduate or professional degrees, while another third have earned bachelor’s degrees. The majority of members lead busy professional lives, with over 70% of the congregation currently employed. Occupations range from professors, accountants, brokers, and lawyers to editors, publishers, marketers, artists, and musicians. The largest concentration of parishioner employment seems to be in the arts and music, followed by education.

The survey results also reveal the rich diversity of spiritual journeys taken by parishioners on their path to Ascension. Roughly half of members identify as “cradle” Episcopalians and half come from other faith traditions. Of that number, most have come from various Protestant denominations or Roman Catholicism, while 10% have roots in other backgrounds including Eastern Orthodoxy, Judaism, Islam, or have no religious upbringing.

According to our parish survey, 54% of parishioners are female and 46% are male, and 59% are 55 years of age or older. Though the scarcity of children in our midst has been of concern to many parishioners, this comes as little surprise given our demographic makeup—while 40% of parishioners are parents, only 14% have children under the age of 20. Parishioners tend to come to church as singles, rather than as couples or families: while fewer than half of parishioners are married, and just a third of the total congregation attends church with a spouse/partner. About a third of our

members identify as LGBT. Ascension parishioners appreciate and nurture the heterogeneous mixture of people they find here, and there are no divisions between young and old, married and single, gay and straight. On the contrary, we deeply value our diversity and come together as a unified group in love and service. This sense of “community” and “family” was frequently noted at roundtable discussions.

Further statistical information can be found in our [parish survey](#).



## Worship & Liturgy



Worship at Ascension is central to our parish life and mission. The beauty and formality of our liturgy is consistently mentioned as one of the things parishioners cherish most and one of our greatest strengths. While almost half the respondents to our parish survey say they have come from other faith backgrounds, close to 90% say they strongly value the traditional Episcopal liturgy celebrated at Ascension. Roundtable discussions confirmed this, with our current liturgy and music standards being regularly cited as the things participants most want to maintain.

The liturgy at Ascension can be characterized as “broad church”—“not too High, not too Low,” as one parishioner put it. We have two services on Sunday based on the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. The 9 a.m. service at the side altar is a said Eucharist without music, and attracts

a small but dedicated group of 10 to 20 worshipers on an average Sunday. The 11 a.m. service is a sung Eucharist from September through May, with service music, a chanted Eucharistic prayer, and a full professional choir. We celebrate a Rite I Eucharist on the first Sunday of every month and a Rite II Eucharist (rotating Eucharistic Prayers A, B, C, and D) on all other Sundays. In the summer months, while the choir is on hiatus, all services are spoken. We have a 6 p.m. Rite II said Eucharist Monday through Friday, which draws a handful of regular worshipers and the occasional visitor.

In roundtable discussions, many parishioners voiced their preference for intelligent sermons that speak to both the mind and the heart, while others pointed out that preaching should be “accessible and relatable” that “help things resonate in real life.” Sermons are generally about 10 minutes in length with 15 minutes as a maximum.

On most Sundays, we can count on a solid group of “regulars.” Almost half of our survey respondents say they attend church at least once a week, while about 30 percent say they attend two to three times a month. Our average attendance at the 11 a.m. service is 150. Attendance drops significantly during the summer months, when many of our parishioners are out of town, and the lack of air-conditioning in the church makes it difficult for some of our members to attend. Our average Sunday attendance has increased by about 20% over the past five years, since the renovation of the church interior, though it is down 10% over the last ten years, and congregational growth remains a long-term problem and an ongoing priority.

On major feast days, we “pull out all the stops” with incense and an extended procession through the church. On Christmas Eve we celebrate a 5 p.m. family service and an 11 p.m. festival Eucharist; on Christmas Day we have an 11 a.m. Eucharist with carols. An Ash Wednesday liturgy is

offered at 8 a.m., noon, and 7 p.m. Ascension’s Holy Week services are an extremely important part of our parishioners’ worship experience. The exuberant liturgy of Palm Sunday is in contrast a few days later to a Wednesday evening Tenebrae service offered by seminarians. On Maundy Thursday, the clergy participate in foot washing and stripping the altar, followed by an all-night prayer vigil in the chapel. In recent years, our three-hour Good Friday service has included the reading of the Passion Gospel of John, with members of the congregation taking various roles, and the Veneration of the Cross. The Great Vigil of Easter on Saturday night begins in darkness with the lighting of new fire and ends with the joyous first Eucharist of the Resurrection. Two services follow on Easter Sunday at 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. While our average attendance at the Christmas Midnight Mass is 350 and on Easter Day is 400, we were extremely pleased to have 534 worshipers with us on Easter Sunday last spring, an increase of 15 percent over the previous year. This is a trend we would like to see continue.

Ascension Day, our feast of title, is celebrated on the Sunday following and is the occasion for confirmations and receptions. Last year, five new members were received. For the past two years, we have held a Blessing of the Animals in celebration of the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, which has quickly become very popular with parishioners as well as the wider community. Beyond our regular services, we conduct on average 12 weddings, 4 to 6 baptisms and 6 to 10 funerals a year.

While parishioners have expressed particular interest in adding Evensong and some form of meditation or centering prayer to our service schedule, we look to our clergy to guide us in forms of worship that will nurture our parish life together, broaden our spiritual horizons, and encourage us to glorify God in new ways.



## Music at Ascension



Music holds a very special place in the hearts and minds of parishioners at Ascension. Many of us were first attracted to services here by the high quality of the music and the spiritual dimension it adds to the liturgy. A long tradition of musical excellence, both in the services and in our renowned concert series, has built Ascension's national reputation, attracted new members and frequent visitors, formed a strong internal bond within the parish, and served as an important outreach to the broader community.

Much of the credit for this goes to our choir director and organist for more than 30 years, Dennis Keene. A highly regarded musician who trained in prestigious schools and with famous mentors, Dr. Keene brings a level of professionalism that builds on our traditions and maintains the highest musical standards.

A choir of 15 paid singers and several professionally trained volunteer parishioners perform at the 11 a.m. service every Sunday from September to May, as well as on Christmas Eve and at Holy Week services. Many of the singers whose initial contact with Ascension was as paid choir members eventually joined the parish, attracted by the synthesis of music, liturgy, and spirituality they experience here. In addition to the hymns and responses, the choir generally performs at least two anthems, usually an Offertory and a Communion piece, and, once a month, a choral setting of the Ordinary of the Mass. Feast days feature additional musical pieces. Repertory is broad and varied and includes periods and styles from Gregorian chant to great classic pieces, traditional Anglican standards, spirituals, American works, and new compositions.

The most outstanding recent development in Ascension's musical life has been the building, installation, and inauguration of the Manton Memorial Organ. Designed specifically for Ascension and built by one of the world's finest artisans, Pascal Quoirin of St. Didier, France, the new organ made its debut in late 2010 following an extensive renovation of the church interior and a long, careful installation process. With two consoles, one electric-action and one mechanical-action ("tracker"), 95 stops, and 111 ranks, the organ is tailor-made to perform the eclectic repertory favored at Ascension. It is the first French-made organ ever installed in New York City and was made possible by a generous grant from The Manton Foundation honoring the memory of two beloved long-time parishioners and supporters of music at Ascension, Sir Edwin and Lady Manton.

Ascension Music, Inc. is a separately incorporated concert organization that presents performances by the Voices of Ascension, led by Dennis Keene, artistic director.

The professional group evolved from a long-standing series of "services of music" at Ascension and was incorporated in 1991 to facilitate attracting financial support from a broader range of the community. Voices of Ascension performed five programs in six performances (the popular Christmas concert was given twice) in the most recent season. Ascension Music also takes advantage of the prestige of our new organ by presenting a series of recitals played by some of the world's best-known organists. The concerts are often reviewed and attract a sophisticated, devoted audience, providing recognition and renown for the parish well beyond the limits of churchgoers and the religious community.

In discussion groups and responses to the questionnaire preparing for this profile, parishioners expressed nearly universal appreciation for the beauty and quality of music at Ascension. To the question "what attracted you to Ascension and why do you stay?", music scored the highest percentages of any reason offered, with 73% saying music was a factor in their initial attraction, and 84% giving it as a reason they continue to attend. In the roundtable groups, many felt that we could leverage the music program as an even stronger magnet to increase membership and support for the parish. Others suggested the creation of a youth choir could help us attract more families and young people in the area. In addition to Ascension Music concerts, the church is sometimes a venue for new music concerts, including music written by professional composers who are parishioners or choir members. These concerts reach an entirely different segment of New York's very diverse audience and could serve as a model for expanding our musical opportunities, given the high level of interest and support within the parish and the local community.



## Parish Life



### *Parish Governance*

The parish is headed by a rector and two wardens, along with a vestry consisting of 12 members. The vestry meets once a month and at other times when necessary.

Vestry elections take place at the annual meeting, which is held on the last Sunday in January. The vestry election always offers a slate of candidates greater than the number of vacancies so that parishioners are offered a choice. We have found this process to be a critical component of fair and open parish governance. Wardens serve two-year terms and vestry members serve three-year terms, both with a maximum of six consecutive years. Each vestry member oversees a portfolio and acts as the liaison to the committees or guilds within that portfolio. Our active

committees include: activities, buildings and grounds, Christian education/spiritual development, finance, fine arts, garden group, hospitality, pastoral care, stewardship, and Ascension Outreach, Inc.

While in transition, the clergy consists of an interim pastor and an assisting priest. The most recent rector engaged an associate rector, and supply priests were used when necessary, with guest clergy invited as celebrants or preachers on special occasions. Ascension has regularly taken advantage of the proximity of General Theological Seminary and of the numerous clergy in various positions around New York City as sources of speakers, preachers, and priests to help out at crunch times. We have also benefited intermittently from the service of vocational deacons.

For many years Ascension has offered one or two field placement positions to seminarians, who are usually students at General Seminary.

The lay administrative staff consists of five full-time employees who report to the rector: a parish administrator, a receptionist/secretary, a bookkeeper, a sexton, and an assistant sexton.

### *Lay Ministries*

Lay participation in Ascension's communal worship is strong, and many parishioners find fulfillment by taking active roles in our services. A team of acolytes assists the clergy at the 11 a.m. Sunday service, leading the processions, preparing the altar for the Eucharist, and performing all the special liturgical duties involved in observing feasts and holy days. Due to the small number of children in the parish, acolytes are all adults, though our roundtable discussions suggest that a program to train youth in serving at the

altar would be a welcome development in the future. Lay readers, ushers, and chalice bearers also take key roles in our corporate worship. Devoted members of the altar guild care for the linens and vestments used in the liturgy. Lay Eucharistic visitors carry the consecrated elements to parishioners who are unable to attend church. Healing Prayer is offered at the side altar during Communion by lay prayer leaders. Clergy oversee, direct, and train lay people in these roles, and rotational schedules are prepared by the parish administrator.

### *Spiritual Development and Christian Education*

A variety of programs at Ascension engage us in the spiritual journey that we share as a parish family. There are seasonal classes led by clergy or invited guests, as well as a Monday night Bible study group and a men's spirituality group, both organized and led by lay members. Ascension hosts a Tuesday evening Education for Ministry class, attended by parishioners as well as members of other churches.

We use Lent as a particularly reflective time and organize a series of House Eucharists in which a small number of people gather at someone's home for an informal Eucharist followed by a potluck supper. These intimate get-togethers are an opportunity for both spiritual communion and for deepening acquaintances into friendships. Another seasonal tradition is the editing and publication of a Lenten devotional booklet containing reflections by parishioners on the daily readings for each of the 40 days in the penitential period. The volunteer devotional contributors often share moving personal experiences that inform the way they read the scriptures. The devotional is published in hard copy and online versions.



A clergy-led Inquirer's Class takes place each year during Lent. Those interested in joining our parish or learning more about the Episcopal Church are invited to the weekly sessions which culminate in baptism, confirmation, and/or reception during our Ascension Sunday service.

An active spiritual development committee plans regular programs of guest speakers throughout the year and sponsors weekend retreats at monasteries during the Lenten or Easter seasons. Quiet days are organized for both Lent and Advent.

Sunday school is offered from September through May during the 11 a.m. service. We have a rotating group of dedicated teachers who organize educational activities for two groups of children separated into "youngers" and "olders." The number of children in attendance varies from two to five. During the academic year, children ages 4 and older leave the service to go to Sunday school just before the First Lesson. They are brought back to the church in time to take communion with their families, and then return to the Sunday school to finish their classroom activities. For younger children, nursery care is available from 10:30 a.m. until the end of the 11 a.m. service.

Parishioners who want to consider a vocation in the church go through a discernment process with a lay committee at Ascension. Evidence that our parish has been a particularly inspirational place comes from the fact that an unusually large number of candidates for ordination have emerged from our midst in recent years.

While participation in these activities has been reasonably strong, we feel that much could be done to inspire even more parishioners to join in. A new rector will need to take the lead in encouraging involvement as well as in setting the spiritual agenda, providing connections within the larger church community, and pushing the boundaries of our knowledge and experience.



### *Pastoral Care*

Our parish community often functions as both a primary and support resource for many of our members at difficult times in their lives. A sizeable segment of the Ascension family is composed of members over age 55, who live alone in New York. Parishioners who have health concerns or other vital problems are cared for and monitored by our clergy with a growing group of caring laity. It is not unusual for clergy to receive communication from friends and relatives asking us to be a connection for them with those to whom we minister.

In recent years, the pastoral care mission has been in need of both greater clergy participation and a more organized and trained volunteer base. We want to strengthen this crucial area of our parish life with an approach that could include lay training to encourage more robust and more effective participation. Recently, healing and intercessory prayer have been introduced as a component of our 11 a.m. service at the side altar.

### *Activities and Fellowship*

While the people of Ascension take our spiritual lives and our worship very seriously, we also enjoy having fun and socializing together. In our heterogeneous group, there are many fascinating people to meet, and warm, friendly faces to greet. The hospitality and activities committees organize both regularly occurring functions and a variety of special events. Coffee hour immediately following the 11 a.m. service on Sunday is a weekly opportunity to make friends and welcome newcomers. A number of us have begun our journey in faith at Ascension at coffee hour. On special occasions, volunteers bring treats of deviled eggs and salads, desserts,

and other delights—for celebration in Ascension style. A festive Easter brunch is usually our largest gathering, and summer barbeques are popular monthly events.

In June, New York's Gay Pride Parade passes down Fifth Avenue directly in front of Ascension. Church volunteers set up a table to provide water for marchers, a tradition that began many years ago, well before gay pride was as generally accepted as it is today.

Other traditions that have drawn us together over the years have included the mystery dinner (cocktails offered at one home, dinner in another, dessert in the parish hall), a Christmas party, Shrove Tuesday pancake supper, field trips, and reading groups. Some of these events have seen decreased attendance or fallen by the wayside altogether. However results from roundtable discussions indicated new interest in activities as a way of strengthening our community of faith.

### *Outreach Ministries*

Expanding Ascension's outreach ministries is one of the top priorities for our congregation, according to parish survey results. A core group of parishioners drives current activities within our parish, our Greenwich Village neighborhood, the wider city, and beyond.

In 2006, Ascension Outreach was set up as a 501-c3 umbrella organization to enable us to raise funds from outside the immediate parish. Funds from Ascension Outreach support the Michael D. Fender Food Pantry, which seeks to alleviate the problem of hunger in the greater Greenwich Village area. Begun in 1982 and named after the parishioner who was the driving force behind its creation, the Food Pantry operates on Saturday mornings, when volunteers hand out

bags of non-perishable food items and then pack bags for the following week. At present, approximately 200 people line up for the Saturday distributions. The number has more than tripled in the last few years as the adjacent neighborhood has evolved, straining the financial resources of the program and causing us to suspend a second weekly distribution day on Tuesdays. The program's dedicated group of volunteers hopes to be able to restore the Tuesday distribution in the future. Ascension parishioners are the anchors for organizing the Food Pantry, but there are a significant number of volunteers from outside the parish family. As executive director of Ascension Outreach, the associate rector devotes a large portion of time to the program.

Ascension Outreach also supports a tutoring program for schoolchildren that meets on Monday afternoons. Led by volunteers, the program assists children with learning challenges in reading comprehension, mathematics, and other subjects. The tutoring program is in search of a way to become more known in the community, to help children in need discover the program, and to build its volunteer base. Both the Food Pantry and the tutoring program would benefit from greater clergy visibility during their hours of operation.

Other outreach programs include a men's shelter, which offers a safe place to sleep for a limited number of homeless men during the coldest winter months. Ascension participates in finding volunteers for the program, which is hosted by our neighbors at First Presbyterian Church.

Since Hurricane Sandy dealt New York City a devastating blow in October 2012, Ascension has attempted to become involved with a Habitat for Humanity project and has participated in a clothing drive for the victims.

Parishioners participate in the Diocesan-sponsored Carpenter's Kids program in which we support 65 children

in Tanzania, buying clothing and books that allow them to attend school.

Until recently, Canterbury Downtown, an Episcopal group for college students, met at Ascension for Sunday evening Eucharist and a free dinner afterwards. While the group now has services at the NYU Interfaith Center on Wednesday evenings, Ascension still provides meeting and office space. Many parishioners expressed concern in our roundtable discussions and questionnaire that we are not active enough in the university community, especially considering that we are literally surrounded by NYU dorms.

Ascension offers space for an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting six days a week and for monthly gatherings of the C.S. Lewis Society. The church is part of New York City Landmarks and New York Open House tours that are regularly held in Greenwich Village.

Survey comments suggest that Ascension should increase our presence in neighborhood activities (attend community board meetings, for example), that we reignite relations with the wider ecumenical and interfaith spiritual community, and that we participate in broader citywide and global programs. Such expanded activity will require a larger parish volunteer base, which we hope will be a natural outgrowth of a newly inspired Ascension parish, led by a rector with energy and a vision to renew participation in, and excitement for, these important ministries.



## Finances & Stewardship



Ascension's current financial picture reflects both the exciting developments and difficult economic times that have affected our parish over the last several years. While we are fortunate to have substantial endowments, we are also confronting significant financial challenges that must be addressed. Like many organizations, our endowments sustained considerable losses in the 2008 market collapse, and although we are recovering well, we are not yet back to where we were. Furthermore, the downturn occurred just as we were undertaking the long-deferred restoration of our church building and installation of the Manton Memorial Organ in 2009-10. Market conditions, construction expenses, and the loss of several key donors combined to contribute to our current financial situation, which, while not dire, must be dealt with for the continued health and growth of our parish.

The value of our endowments as of December 31, 2012, was \$13.1 million. They are managed by prominent financial institutions and overseen by the finance committee and the vestry. Although some income is restricted in use for specific purposes, income from most of the endowments is available for general operating expenses. We are strict about only using income and never touching endowment principal, a practice so important that the vestry annually reconfirms its continued commitment to it.

Our annual operating budget showing projected expenses of \$1,119,471 in 2013 is prepared by the finance committee and approved by the vestry. Income and expenses are carefully monitored and managed by the clergy, bookkeeper, treasurer, finance committee, and vestry during the year. Other expenses, such as Ascension Music, Inc. and Ascension

Outreach, are separately funded and are not included in this budget. Current donors cover less than half of our expenses with the balance covered by endowment income. In preparing our budget, we include endowment income based on our spending rule of 5% of the value of the fund over the preceding three years. However, in each of the past five years we have run an annual deficit, expected to be \$250,000 for 2013, which is covered with additional endowment income above and beyond the amount we budget according to our 5% spending rule. The deficit is primarily due to the decrease in endowment income since 2008, as pledge income has increased over this time, and expenses have held steady.

A capital campaign for the 2009 church renovation raised a substantial amount of the funds needed to pay for the work, but we continue to have approximately \$1.5 million outstanding on a \$2.5 million line of credit remaining from that project. We are working on a new capital campaign for the fall of 2013 to raise funds to repay this money and to pay for the needed renovation of the rectory, which is expected to cost nearly \$1 million.

During these challenging times, we have held firmly to our rule of spending endowment income only, and never touching principal. We are also pleased that throughout these years, we have paid our Diocesan assessment in full, and are among the top 10 churches in the Diocese in terms of contributions. In 2012 we requested a small reduction in our annual assessment, in order to hold expenses flat, which was denied. We were instead offered a partial deferral of our payment. We have recently once again appealed for relief, and as of this writing are waiting to hear back from the Diocese for their decision.

Stewardship at Ascension is seen as an opportunity to consider the importance of the church in the life of every parishioner. Annual stewardship talks given by parishioners

## TREASURER'S REPORT

	BUDGET				
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
<i>Operating Income</i>					
Pledge and Offering Income	\$238,787	\$253,598	\$262,479	\$276,395	\$322,000
Flower and Tract Donations	8,637	3,385	7,359	6,787	6,352
Outside Contributions	41,188	34,024	44,653	46,464	48,000
Endowment Income	659,750	576,643	519,044	483,430	491,452
<b>Total Operating Income</b>	<b>\$948,362</b>	<b>\$867,650</b>	<b>\$833,535</b>	<b>\$813,076</b>	<b>\$867,804</b>
<i>Operating Expenses</i>					
Clergy	\$234,711	\$240,120	\$249,072	\$233,054	\$214,051
Administration	352,438	332,468	328,447	327,321	359,710
Music	138,781	125,744	131,647	137,010	138,934
Building	211,729	194,069	201,887	200,410	215,732
General	17,463	13,572	17,097	13,751	16,095
Outside Giving	156,510	161,565	145,941	146,340	174,949
<b>Total Operating Expenses</b>	<b>\$1,111,632</b>	<b>\$1,067,538</b>	<b>\$1,074,091</b>	<b>\$1,057,886</b>	<b>\$1,119,471</b>
<i>Surplus/(Deficit)</i>	<i>(\$163,270)</i>	<i>(\$199,888)</i>	<i>(\$240,556)</i>	<i>(\$244,810)</i>	<i>(\$251,667)</i>

## STEWARDSHIP REPORT

are always moving and meaningful, expressing gratitude for the ways in which Ascension has enriched our lives.

Over the past five years, while the number of pledges has remained substantially the same, pledge dollars have increased by about 15%.

Our parish survey revealed that more than half of our congregation feels that Ascension does not do enough to encourage stewardship. At the same time, fully two-thirds reported contributing less than 5% of their annual gross income to the church. Ideally, we would like to realize enough income from stewardship contributions to decrease significantly our dependence on the endowment. Still, while this is a relatively affluent congregation—60% of respondents say their annual gross household income exceeds \$100,000—it is by no means wealthy. A significant number of parishioners (20%) report their income as between \$50,000 and \$100,000, and 15% report income under \$50,000. That leaves many of our parishioners with little disposable income after accounting for the cost of living in New York City. Our next rector should understand that our parishioners want to help, and want to be *asked* to help, but she or he should not imagine that raising our pledge numbers will be a simple matter. One encouraging development in this regard should be mentioned, however. For 2013, in response to a direct appeal from our associate rector, pledges have broken the \$300,000 mark for the first time in eight years. This increase of more than 20% over the previous year certainly demonstrates that our congregation is ready and willing to give generously to support the church.

Clearly, our current financial situation is not sustainable for the long term, and our challenges are significant. We need to balance our budget, increase donations, reduce our debt, and rely much less on our endowment income. We know that there are no quick

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Number of Pledges	123	126	126	115	127
Total Dollars Pledged	\$224,169	\$237,247	\$239,087	\$246,229	\$301,003
Average Pledge	\$1,823	\$1,884	\$1,898	\$2,141	\$2,370

fixes for these issues, many of which we share with other churches around the Diocese and around the country, and the prospect of turning things around may seem daunting. We believe, however, that we have a great deal of untapped potential in our people, our buildings, our music program, and our central location. We expect our next rector to be able to help us develop our resources, take an active role in strengthening our financial situation, and help us confront these challenges vigorously and creatively. We can promise that she or he will not be dealing with this single-handedly, and will have the committed support and assistance of our wardens, our vestry, and the entire congregation.



## The Future



The Church of the Ascension is at a special moment in our development as a Christian community. Embedded in a highly secular urban environment, our community is spiritually strong, open-minded, unpretentious, seeking, tolerant, and serious about our faith. There is a palpable sense of energy and excitement about what is taking shape these days in our parish. We have fostered a strong and healthy lay leadership, we have worked hard to repair and upgrade our church building, and our music program is among the very best in the country. Our “broad church” approach speaks deeply to parishioners. We are sincere and conscientious in celebrating the liturgy with due regard to tradition, whether it is a simple service at the side altar or a high feast day observed with music and incense. On social issues, we embrace an inclusive stance,



and we worship as one body that, happily, is not divided into subgroups or factions.

There are, of course, challenges. The financial issues detailed above are daunting but not impossible to solve. Pastoral care is one example of an area needing strong leadership from the new rector. We have not successfully attracted families, gay or straight, with school-aged children, and we yearn for an expansion of the community to include more young members.

The Church of the Ascension is a spiritually and emotionally healthy community that feels itself to be on the cusp of a new flowering. We crave charismatic and visionary leadership to grow our church. We seek a collaborative, dynamic, energetic leader with good listening skills, compassion, and kindness, along with sound business and administrative skills. We expect a spiritual leader who appreciates the importance of liturgy and music, and who will inspire us as a preacher, teacher, and guide.

Clearly, this position is not a sinecure. While we can promise that a call to Ascension will be a fascinating and exciting opportunity, we seek a spiritual leader who will energetically confront the challenges we face with love, determination, and creative thinking. Our new rector must help us grow in numbers by showing a sincere interest in newcomers and engaging all of us so that we commit ourselves more fully to God's work. We aspire to increase our role as witnesses to the larger community around us of what faith can mean in our time. We are looking for a rector who is eager to engage the largest questions of what church is for: a person with courage, vision, tenacity, humility, and wisdom.

In return, we offer an eager community of faith which has the potential to grow, the urge to learn, the desire to worship, and the mission to serve.



# The Rector We Seek

## *7 Important Qualities*



1. *A Priest* who reverently administers the sacraments with an appreciation for the power and beauty of the liturgy.
2. *A Pastor* who is caring, discreet, and an empathetic counselor in times of need.
3. *A Preacher and Teacher* who opens our minds to the richness of scripture, explains the history and relevance of Christian teachings, and inspires us to seek God in our everyday lives.
4. *A Guide* who helps us to develop spiritually and discerns our gifts and talents.
5. *A Leader* who is confident, collaborative, and creative, who has a demonstrated ability to fund raise, and is able to enlist and engage the full congregation in the mission of the church.
6. *A Manager* who has sound business sense and is experienced in handling finances and organizing staff.
7. *A Communicator* who is warm and personable, relates to people of all ages, is willing to reach out to the community and other organizations, and is able to express effectively the needs and goals of the church for worship, stewardship, outreach, and service.





## HOW CAN WE GROW?

As we have stated several times in this profile, Ascension very much needs to increase our number of active parishioners. In this we are probably similar to most parishes in the country. There are several particularities, however, of Ascension's situation and prospects that need to be considered.

First, unlike parishes that may be in out of the way or low-traffic areas, Ascension is in the epicenter of the nation's largest city. We are highly visible. Many people come in to see our beautiful church and hear our beautiful music. Every Sunday, we see new faces, and on Easter and Christmas, there are seas of unfamiliar attendees. While many of these people who casually encounter Ascension are tourists, there are plenty who live in New York as well. Thus we have considerable opportunity to introduce ourselves to potential congregants. How do we get people to return and to participate more fully? What are they seeking that we do not offer? We know why our current members were attracted to Ascension and stayed, but we don't know why others who have crossed our portal have not followed suit.

Second is the question of how we attract children and younger people. In fact these are two totally different groups. As we note in the "Our Neighborhood" section, families with school-aged children are a small part of our neighborhood demographic, and therefore more difficult to develop as a source of new members. Moreover, even for the families we do attract, the typical cycle is that when the children reach school age, the family moves to a place where space is less expensive and schools are more affordable. This is simply the reality of our location in an area of extremely high property values.

Young adults and students, on the other hand, abound in our vicinity. Many live in the Village, and many more come here for the many attractions the neighborhood offers. Finding a way to draw in these young people is an obvious opportunity for us. But how?

We do not expect anyone to have quick and easy answers for these questions. We do, however, envisage a rector who will thoroughly think through these issues with us, put a priority on finding solutions, and do everything in his or her power to realize the goal of a larger parish family.

# Information on How to Apply



Contact the Ascension search committee by sending your cover letter, resumé, and OTM Profile to [search@ascensionnyc.org](mailto:search@ascensionnyc.org).  
Or you may mail the information above to:

*The Search Committee  
The Church of the Ascension  
511 Avenue of the Americas #181  
New York, NY 10011*

The deadline for submissions is December 1, 2013.  
We look forward to hearing from you!

## THE CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION

*Parish House*  
12 West 11th Street  
New York, NY 10011  
[www.ascensionnyc.org](http://www.ascensionnyc.org)

*Wardens*  
Steven Hubbard, David Cholcher

*Vestry*  
Derek Baker, Dorothy Dinsmoor, Ned Fitch,  
Mary Gaillard, Barbara Head, Jennifer Lemaigre,  
Kevin Lippert, Tom Rice, Charles Schmidt,  
Isabel Spencer, Stacy Spikes, Meredith Ward

*Search Committee*  
Meredith Ward (Chair), Eve Beglarian,  
Barbara M. Burns, Peter Clark, Janet Fisher, Ned Fitch,  
Sirkka Kyle, Jennifer Lemaigre, Ethan Mandel,

*Clergy*  
The Rev. Shelley D. McDade, Interim Pastor  
The Rev. Edwin Chinery, Assisting Priest

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Elana Schlenker

