

life at ASCENSION

Volume 30, Number 5

October—November, 2009

AUTUMNAL MUSINGS

I love Autumn in New York, as much as Frank Sinatra did who sang so memorably about this splendid season in the City. This season of the year always feels like a time of new beginnings for me, partly because of my many years on college campuses and also, no doubt, because September is my birth month.

At Ascension, this fall will have a special poignancy and excitement for us as it is the last season for a while that we will be using our beautiful sanctuary for worship. After Christmas Eve, we will move everything portable out of the church in preparation for the major construction projects that will prepare that space for the arrival of the Manton Memorial Organ in September, 2010. As a community, we will spend a considerable stretch of time “camping out” as it were, in the Parish Hall where we will learn to worship together in new, perhaps more intimate ways. This isn’t the first time that the Ascension family has experienced such a dislocation in living memory and, rather than thinking of it as a hardship, I believe that it will be an adventurous time when we can grow even closer together.

The summer months were filled with the bustle, dirt and noise of continuing construction on the exterior of the church. We expect that the roof, windows and walls will be perfectly water-tight by the end of October, as we have repaired the roof, added new copper gutters and downspouts as well as re-pointing another area of brownstones on the south clerestory. All of this work is part of the “Sealed by the Spirit” capital campaign that you have supported with your generous pledges. We are planning another event in November to give new members and others who haven’t yet pledged the chance to join with us in this important project. The next phase of building work will involve installing a new electrical and lighting system in the church, making decisions about the color scheme for re-painting the interior walls, and preparing the organ chambers for the new instrument.

Our regular round of fall activities will continue as before. Soon, your lay and clergy leaders will be asking you to consider your annual stewardship responsibilities to the church once more. We have some interesting Sunday Forums planned as well as some outside speakers scheduled. The Advent Quiet Day is being readied and before long, it will be time to round up volunteers to help at the Homeless Shelter during the winter months.

Parish life, with its mixture of the predictable liturgical cycle and the always-unexpected element of surprise, has built into it just the right amount of challenge and comfort to keep our souls alive and growing. I invite each of you to find a new way this year to draw closer to the good folks at Ascension, as the season changes and the calendar turns over once again.

Andrew Foster, Rector

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Vestry Notes

At its September Meeting the Vestry:

-Learned from Fr. Andrew that we will be participating in Open House New York on October 10th and 11th.

-Learned that there will be a Memorial Eucharist for parishioner Joe MacMallo on Wednesday, October 7th at 6:00 p.m.

-Heard Fr. Mark report that Ascension Outreach exceeded its fundraising goal of \$115,000 by \$33,000.

-Learned from Fr. Mark that he received a check for \$15,000 from the Gerry Trust for our Sealed By The Spirit campaign.

-Heard parishioner Maurice Seaton talk about Planned Giving and establishing a Legacy Society.

-Learned that the South Clerestory brownstone work is close to completion and that the scaffolding will be removed as soon as it is finished.

-Learned that the Diocesan Assessment has been reduced by 20% this year and that a special Diocesan task force is preparing a report on suggested changes going forward in the way assessments are calculated.

-Learned that Van Rogers has accepted the position of Flower Guild chairperson.

-Learned that Annual Stewardship plans are underway.

- *Sibyl Piccone*



The Rector, flanked by the Wardens, prepares for the most recent meeting to begin.

The Vestry generally meets on the third Wednesday of each month at 7 p.m. in the Parish Hall. Meetings are open to the parish and parishioners are welcome, in advance of the meeting, to request time to address Vestry.

life at ASCENSION

is published bimonthly by the Church of the Ascension. We welcome submissions, reserving the right to edit for style and length, if necessary. The deadline for contributions is the 15th of the month preceding publication.

A Generous Gift to Ascension

As most of us know, from time to time Ascension is named as the beneficiary of planned gifts, which can be made pursuant to an individual's will, through various types of trusts, or by designating Ascension as the beneficiary of a retirement plan or insurance policy, to name a few possibilities. As we approach the fall stewardship season, we will be hearing about the formation of a "legacy society" to recognize those who have provided for Ascension in this way (stay tuned for more news about this legacy society in Merry Noises and an upcoming Life at Ascension). This type of planned giving is an important component of stewardship, in addition to the annual pledge we make to the operating budget, gifts of our time and talent, and extraordinary capital gifts we make from time to time, such as through the current Sealed by the Spirit capital campaign here at Ascension. Planned gifts do not replace the annual and capital giving necessary to maintain our "life at Ascension," but they are a vital component of stewardship.

We are often quite familiar with the individuals who make planned gifts to Ascension, but from time to time we are pleasantly surprised by unexpected gifts where we know little if anything about the donor. Ascension was recently notified of one such gift from the estate of Ilona Ptasnik. When Fr. Andrew presented the news to Vestry, no one had any knowledge of the Ptasnik family, but a little internet research reveals a fascinating story.

Ilona Ptasnik was born in Amsterdam in 1918, to Kelman Josef Ptasnik and Betje Vecht. At some point prior to or during World War II, the family moved to the United States. Mr. Ptasnik was an inventor living in New Jersey and working in New York, and among the patents that one can find associated with his name through a simple Google search is an "adhesive transfer tape dispenser," applied for in 1945. He also held patents for "tape with adhesive and non-adhesive areas" (filed in 1945) and a "portable cigarette making machine" (filed in 1940). Mr. Ptasnik died in 1966 in Santa Barbara, California, and genealogical records from Santa Barbara indicate that he was buried in Paramus, New Jersey. At the time of his death, he disposed of a portion of his estate to a number of Jewish charities and also established a trust for his daughter, Ilona. The trust was divided into two parts, both of which were for Ilona's benefit during her life. Upon Ilona's death one part of the trust was hers to dispose of freely, and the other part was subject to a "power of appointment" which she could exercise in favor of charities she designated in her will. Ilona died in Amsterdam at the age of 89, and Ascension was designated as a beneficiary of this second part of the trust, along with the national Episcopal Church and the American Red Cross.

Exploring a bit deeper, there is a poignant background associated with the family's Jewish roots in the Netherlands. Ilona Ptasnik's mother, Betje Vecht, was born in 1891 in Elburg, a small town in the Netherlands with a small Jewish population dating back at least to the 1700s. During World War II, 21 Jews were deported from Elburg to Nazi concentration camps, only one of whom survived. Betje's mother (Ilona's maternal grandmother), Diena Vecht, was one of the 21 deported. She died at Auschwitz on September 24, 1943, at the age of 89 (her husband, Mozes Vecht had died in Amsterdam in 1933). Today there is a museum in Elburg about Jewish life in that small town, which includes a restoration of the former synagogue, information on which can be found at www.sjoelburg.nl (in Dutch). *(continued on page 8)*

Renewing a Landmark: Update on the Restoration Project



Behind the draped netting on the south side of Ascension, work has been steadily moving forward to restore the brownstone of the upper clerestory walls of our church and the lower west bay, which covers the organ chamber. The project started in May,

and it's expected that work will be completed by the end of October. It's been a big job. What has the work involved?

One of the first things you will notice when the netting and scaffolding comes down is the improved look of the stones themselves. Over the 168 years since the Church of the Ascension was completed in 1841, time and weather, as well as some mistaken construction decisions, have served to erode and deteriorate the stones,

Also striking will be the new mortar between the stones, lighter in color than the old mortar. The reasons for the change are important, and reassuring. Back in the 1940s or 1950s, the brownstones were repointed, a worthwhile undertaking in theory but flawed in execution. Popular at the time was a material called Portland cement, and this was used for our mortar as well as the mortar in countless masonry construction projects throughout the U. S.

Only after several years was it discovered that because of its extreme hardness, Portland cement kept stones from being able to move slightly and naturally, or "breathe."

Stones cracked under the pressure, and in the case of Ascension's soft brownstones, the cracking was extensive. In part, it has been responsible for the leaks we've experienced in recent years.

New Mortar, Old Design

The new mortar is not only lighter in color, but also far softer than the Portland cement, avoiding the problem of excessive pressure on the stones. This type of softer mortar has been used with great success in buildings with similar stones to Ascension's. We have good reason to expect that the mortar will extend the life of the church for many generations.

The mortar color was chosen after workers drilled out the Portland cement and found remnants of the original mortar from the 1840s. With the new, lighter mortar, we are actually recreating the original look of Ascension, as designed by English architect Richard Upjohn. Working in the mid-nineteenth century, Upjohn was highly regarded for his Gothic Revival churches, which included Trinity Church on Wall Street. His work at Ascension reflected the prevailing style in architecture of pre-Victorian times: stones were outlined in a visible manner by the mortar. Buildings became monolithic in tone only later, in the Victorian era.

Because Ascension is a New York City landmark as well as a National Historic Landmark, we were required to have the Landmarks Preservation Commission of New York review the progress on our brownstone restoration early in the project. They were enthusiastic about the direction we had taken, enabling us to move forward without interruption.

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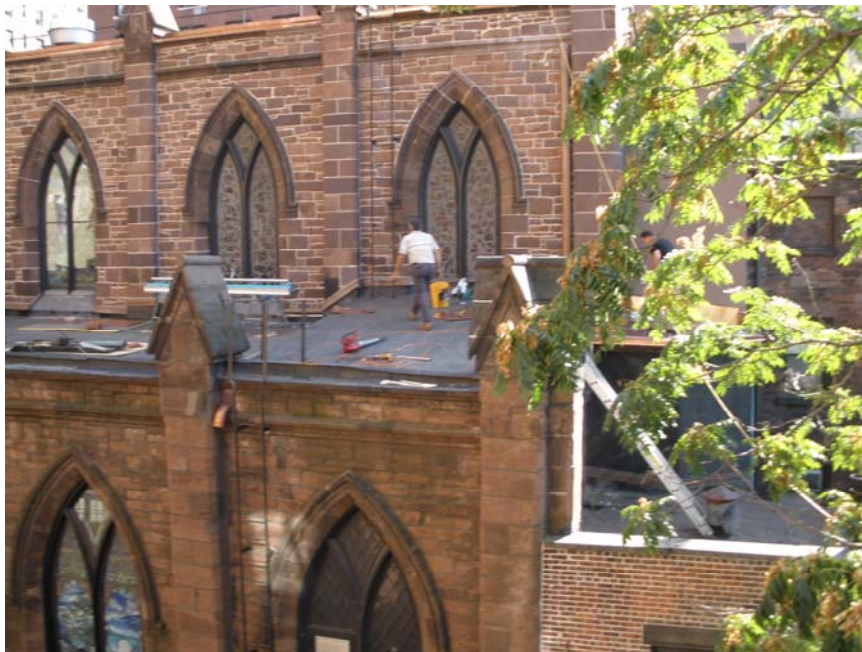
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A palette of stone colors

Architects of churches designed in the 1840s often selected stones in a range of colors and sizes. At Ascension, five different colors have been identified. And the repairs have been addressed with three different approaches, depending on the extent of damage to the stones.

There are 1,000 stones in the south walls we have been restoring. Of these, 85 percent have required attention. Only 10 have needed to be replaced completely, with brand new, matching brownstone blocks, cut to fit. Thirty-five were able to be resurfaced, using a technique called Dutchman refacing, which places a new 1-1/2-inch brownstone “vener” in front of a block that has moderate damage. And the bulk of the work has been in composite repair: 821 stones have had their surfaces renewed and strengthened with a matching clay-like material applied to the deteriorated surfaces.



Up on the roof

A critical part of the restoration project is the installation of new roofing on the high, center roof and above the aisles. Our objective is to produce a water-tight building before the delivery of the extraordinary new organ we are expecting, the gift of the Manton Foundation. The organ is scheduled to arrive in the fall of 2010.

This summer, we have been installing new drains to replace the drains that were in the walls. Flashing has been replaced. There will be three new downspouts on both the upper and lower walls of the north and south sides of the church. These will be of copper, six inches in diameter, replacing the two four-inch downspouts on each side that proved so inadequate to the task of water drainage.

The restoration project has been planned and supervised by preservation architects Jan Hird Pokorny and Associates and our owner’s representative, Leo Blackman Architects. The contractor is the experienced preservation firm Preserv. Fr. Andrew, Wardens Sibyl Piccone and John Grimes, and the Buildings and Grounds Committee have been closely involved throughout the process. We look forward to the successful completion of the project, now close at hand.

Dorothy Dinsmoor

Yes Virginia, You Can Fight City Hall

On Christmas Day, 2008 the *New York Times* ran an article entitled, “Religious Shelters Feel Squeezed by Rules.” It went on to describe initiatives announced by the deputy commissioner of homeless shelters for single adults “to bring more order to the far-flung network of religious social services.”

For over two decades faith-based communities, including the partnership of Ascension, First Presbyterian and St. Luke’s in the Field, had responded to a sharp increase in the homeless population by setting up “emergency” shelters. Religious providers relied on the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) to screen out homeless clients with addictions and serious mental illness and shuttle the other to their neighborhood shelters in vans.

The Bloomberg administration proposed to overhaul the system by eliminating overnight shelter and services at drop-in centers and requiring that faith-based shelters be open a minimum of five days, serve hot meals and provide their own transportation, and screening.

Finding the new rulings untenable, the faith-based community under the aegis of the Emergency Shelter Network formed a Steering Committee and held monthly, well-attended, working meetings. Highlights of the next eight months included meetings with the NYC Council of Churches, the City Plan-

ning Commission, and countless meeting with Housing; a meeting of the faith community at Stephen Wise Free Synagogue; passage of a resolution stating that if DHS did not agree to stated program requirements by June 1, the press would be notified that DHS had forced the shutting down of the faith-based shelters for homeless people. On May 6th a clergy letter with 52 signatures was sent to Mayor Bloomberg. On May 8th, shelters received a letter from DHS Commissioner Robert Hess agreeing to all program requirements. The shelters would remain open.

Minutes of the June 3rd meeting concluded with the words: “This is not over. We never knew each other before. We will continue to communicate and collaborate for better ministries and services for our homeless guests.” As well as the observation that “The reasons we won are that we are dedicated, unified, political, and LOUD.”

It is my pleasure to announce that the homeless shelter housed at First Presbyterian will re-open on the first Sunday in November and Ascension is once again committed to providing a coordinator and two volunteers each and every Tuesday night. **Orientation will be held at First Presbyterian on Thursday, October 15th from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m.** Please join us in this proud tradition of service on behalf of our homeless brethren.

Deacon Anne Auchincloss



Jesus in the Breadline by Fritz Eichenberg

A Generous Gift to Ascension

(continued from page 3)

On the museum's home page (and throughout the website in fact, as a kind of banner) there is a picture of Ilona, at approximately age 3, walking between her grandparents, holding their hands. All three are fashionably dressed for a stroll in the park, the grandparents both wearing hats. Ilona's grandfather wears a three-piece suit and is carrying a walking stick. Ilona smiles and looks at the camera wide-eyed below her mop of curly, light hair. Knowing the facts surrounding the death of Ilona's grandmother years later in the Holocaust makes this family portrait all the more moving.



The Ptasnik bequest to Ascension was undesignated, meaning that the Vestry has the discretion on how to best use the gift. In the past, we have used these unexpected gifts to supplement gaps in funding for important capital projects, and the Vestry has determined in this case to allocate the bequest for work on the electrical and lighting system in the sanctuary, in connection with the preparation of that space for the gift of the Manton memorial organ in the latter part of 2010. It is vital for us to complete this electrical work at the same time as the other work is being done inside the sanctuary, and prior to plastering and painting, and the funds for the project were not included as part of the Sealed by the Spirit capital campaign.

Let us give thanks for the life of Ilona Ptasnik, and consider how we can follow this example of good stewardship in our own way, both through current giving as well as planned giving.

John Grimes, Warden

The Anglican Communion Observer at the United Nations

Join us for a presentation and discussion in the Parish Hall on Thursday, October 22nd from 7:00 p.m.-8:30 p.m. with Helen Grace Wangu, The Anglican Communion Observer at the U.N.



Ascension October & November, 2009 Events

Writing your Spiritual Autobiography Our own journey into relationship with God has many twists and turns. Sometimes our individual journeys can be illuminated and encouraged by the journeys of others, especially other great figures of faith. Join Fr. Mark for this journey into deeper faith, companioned by such figures as St. Augustine, St. Teresa of Avila, Thomas Merton, and Nelson Mandela. This course is open to anyone seeking to explore more deeply their own faith paths. Two sessions will be held on Sunday, October 4th and Sunday November 8th. Sessions are held in the ground floor of the rectory, 7 West 10th Street after the 11:00 a.m. Eucharist.

Recovery Sundays, October 4th and November 1st at 4:00 p.m. in the All Saints' Chapel Ascension's Recovery Eucharist focuses specifically on the brokenness that comes from addiction, both for the afflicted and the affected and the significance of God's gift of love, grace and understanding in the midst of it. Join us for prayers, communion, reflections and sermons in this 12-Step Eucharist.

October Book Group We will discuss "Murder on St. Mark's Place" by Victoria Thompson. Our October meeting will take place on Wednesday, October 7th, at 7p.m. in the Parish Hall. All are invited to attend.

Depth Theology Wednesdays 7:00-8:15p.m. Classes continue each Wednesday (except Nov. 25th). Classes are open to all. Each week we will look at the lectionary readings for the upcoming week and wrestle with them using the tools of theology, psychology, anthropology and whatever other elements you want to bring into the mix. You do not have to attend every class in order to participate. Feel free to bring food.

Fall Foliage trip Saturday October 17th, Come join us for a gorgeous drive up the Hudson to see some of the beautiful colors of fall. We will be departing from the 12 West 11th Street door at 8:15 a.m. Our foliage trip takes us to Poets walk on the Hudson River then to a local restaurant for lunch. Following lunch we go to pick apples and whatever else is in Season. In the past we have arrived back at the church in the late afternoon. Open to the whole community. RSVP Fr. Merz at mailtomerz@gmail.com or Fr. Mark at fmark@ascensionnyc.org

Service Saturday, October 24th, Ascension Parishioners are invited to join the campus ministry student group as they pick a local outreach program and volunteers to help out. Please Contact Fr. Merz at mailtomerz@gmail.com

Marie's Crisis Piano Bar: Let your inner show tune come out as we sing the night away, Thursday October 29th at 8:00 p.m., 59 Grove St., "To walk downstairs into this old West Village bar is to step out of time a bit. As an amicable regular might tell you, the room first opened in the 1850s as a prostitutes' den, became a boy bar by the 1890s, and lasted through Prohibition, when it was known as Marie's (the "Crisis" came from 'The Crisis Papers,' by Thomas Paine, who died in the same house). For the past 35 years, it's plowed through as a piano joint in which neighboring musical theater performers gather round the keys nightly and sing solo—numbers like 'Stranger in Paradise' or 'You're the Top'—to create a mood of both giddiness and longing."-- Karen Hudes, Critic, New York Magazine

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Dennis Keene, *Artistic Director and Conductor*

Announcing the 20th Anniversary Season

“On Tour in New York”

Five Concerts in Five Exciting Venues

SPECIAL OPENING CONCERT

Tuesday, October 27, 2009, at 7:30 pm

(Notice the earlier starting time!)

At Zankel Hall (at Carnegie Hall)

Entrance on Seventh Avenue between 56th & 57th streets

Bach Magnificat in D

The 2009 Winners of the Sorel Composition Competition:

Mary and Gabriel by Abbie Betinis, for chorus and percussion

Anacreontics by Judith Cloud, for chorus and guitar

Benedictus by Jocelyn Hagen for a cappella chorus

Nisi Dominus by Martha Sullivan, for double chorus and orchestra

Candlelight Christmas Concert

Tuesday, December 15, 2009, at 8:00 pm

At the Church of the Ascension

Fifth Avenue at Tenth Street

Fauré *Requiem*

Thursday, February 4, 2010, at 8:00 pm

At St. James' Church

Madison Avenue at 71st Street

Voices of Ascension Signature Pieces by Mendelssohn, Rachmaninoff, Bruckner, Holst, Stanford and others

Rossini *Petite Messe Solennelle*

With international opera star Jennifer Larmore

Monday, March 22, 2010 at 8:00 pm

At Alice Tully Hall, Lincoln Center

65th Street and Broadway

The Glory of Palestrina

Wednesday, May 12, 2010, at 8:00 pm

At the Church of St. Mary the Virgin

145 West 46th Street, just East of Times Square

For Ticket Information CALL 212-358-7060

Or visit www.voicesofascension.org



VOICES OF ASCENSION
CHORUS & ORCHESTRA

DENNIS KEENE,
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR & CONDUCTOR