

ST. GREGORY'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

ANNUAL REPORT 2025



ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
FEBRUARY 1, 2026

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PRAYER OF DEDICATION

Lord Jesus, we give you our hands to do your work. We give you our feet to go your way. We give you our tongues to speak your words. We give you our minds that you may think in us. We give you our spirit that you may pray in us. Above all, we give you our hearts that you may love in us your Father, and all humankind. We give you our whole selves that you may grow in us, so that it is you, Lord Jesus, who live and work and pray in us. **Amen.**

(Adapted from *St. Benedict's Prayer Book*)

AGENDA

- A. Call to Order
- B. Opening Prayer
- C. Approval of 2025 Annual Parish Meeting Minutes
- D. Elections:
 - 1. Vestry Class of 2026-2029 – Elect three members
Nominees = Colleen Ahland, Kimberly Bouzguenda, Holly Graham, David Luebben-Morrill, Alice O’Keefe (profiles of nominees begin on page 8)
 - 2. Delegates to Diocesan Convention 2026 – Elect three delegates (remainder will be designated as alternates)
Candidates = Carol Berstein, Beth Eldon, Holly Graham, Alice O’Keefe, Lizz SpencerNominations from the Floor
Ballots are Cast
- E. Reports
 - 1. Rector’s Report -----The Rev. Michael Fincher
 - 2. Financial Summary & Budget----- Bob McRae
 - 3. Stewardship----- Holly Graham
 - 4. Other Reports/Comments
- F. Appointments
- G. Decommissioning of Outgoing Vestry Members
- H. Commissioning of New Vestry Members
- I. Adjournment

The Annual Meeting will be followed by lunch in the Parish Hall.

MEMBERSHIP IN THE CHURCH (A Summary of the Canons)

The National Canons address membership in the Church and the expectations the Church places on those members:

1. Members of the Church are those persons who have been baptized in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit with water, and whose baptism has been duly recorded in this Church. Adult members are those persons sixteen years of age and older.
2. All adult members of the Church are expected to be confirmed in the Church, or if they have been confirmed in another Christian Church by a Bishop in Apostolic Succession, to have been received into this Church.
3. All members are considered to be communicants of this Church who have received Holy Communion at least three times during the previous year in this Church.
4. All persons in this Church are expected to celebrate and keep the Lord's Day and participate in the Church's public worship.

Communicants in good standing are those who have:

1. Attended corporate worship on a regular basis in their Church unless they have been prevented from doing so for good cause;
2. Have been faithful in working, praying, and giving for the spread of the Kingdom of God.

MINUTES OF THE 2025 ANNUAL PARISH MEETING February 2, 2025

- A. Call to Order: 10:34 AM
- B. Opening Prayer: Fr. Michael Fincher
- C. Approval of the 2024 Annual Parish Meeting Minutes
Motion to approve the 2024 Annual Parish Meeting minutes: MSP Tamara Benedict/Sarah Spencer
- D. Elections
 1. Vestry Class of 2025-2028: Election of three members for 3-year terms
 - a. Nominees: Carol Bernstein, Beth Eldon, Cheryl Rodi
 - b. No nominations from the floor
Motion to close nominations and to elect nominees by acclamation: MSP Tamara Benedict/Sarah Spencer
 2. Delegates to the November 2025 Diocesan Convention: Election of three delegates, one from the vestry and two from the members plus alternates
 - a. Vestry rep will be Elizabeth Spencer
 - b. Other candidates stood when introduced: Kimberly Bouzgueda, Beth Eldon, Holly Graham, Dana Lindsay, Alice O'Keefe, Susan Mora, and Sarah Spencer.
 - c. Nomination from the floor: Aura Arana nominated by Sarah Spencer.
Motion to close nominations: MSP Tamara Benedict/Sarah Spencer

- E. Reports – written reports were provided in the Annual Meeting booklet. Additional information or items of particular interest are noted.
1. Rector: Fr. Michael Fincher
 - a. Pleased to note that attendance has increased and is back to pre-pandemic levels.
 - b. The music program was expanded, and hospitality functions have been realigned.
 - c. Fr. Michael will be on sabbatical from April 28th until August 11th. Mother Sharon will fill in approximately 50% time while he is gone. This will be a time of rest and renewal for Fr. Michael and a sabbatical of sorts for the congregation as well.
 - d. Mother Sharon spoke briefly and shared her excitement about joining us and her desire to get to know us all better.
 2. Sr. Warden: Holly Graham
 - a. Nothing to add to the written report.
 3. Other Reports
 - a. Altar Guild: Holly Graham
 - i. See Holly Graham or Elizabeth Spencer if you are interested in joining.
 - b. Bible Study: Jane Alt and Father Michael
 - i. Regular attendance has grown; all are welcome!
 - c. Building & Grounds: John Mora and Fred Cornett
 - i. Heavy rain early in the year led to roof leaks and a resurgence of “Lake Gregory.” Both were repaired. We also had a number of lighting issues in the main church. These have also been taken care of.
 - d. Early Christian Education: Dana Lindsay and Tamera Benedict
 - i. We have expanded to two classes, one for beginners and one for youth.
 - ii. Attendance is up in the nursery on Sunday.
 - iii. There may be an open house for Christian Education in March.
 - e. Feeding Programs: Bill Eldon and Tamera Benedict
 - i. Tamera reported that Feed My Lambs is the first Saturday of the month at St. Luke’s.
 - ii. Bill reported that the food bank is the third Wednesday of the month. The numbers have gone way up and the budget, which is funded by parishioner donations, is starting to dwindle.
 - f. Greeters: Susan Mora
 - i. We are always in need of more greeters to welcome parishioners and newcomers. See Susan if interested in helping.
 - g. Men’s Fellowship: John Mora
 - i. The Men’s Fellowship has been meeting on Zoom to allow former parishioners in other parts of the country to join.
 - ii. Some of the St. Gregory’s men have been regularly attending the second Saturday Breakfast with the men of St. Thomas.
 - h. Music: David York (see written report)
 - i. Outreach: Dana Lindsay
 - i. There is a handout with the calendar for 2025. She noted that Outreach is not a budget item, relies on parishioner contributions.

- j. Parish Life: Elizabeth Spencer
 - i. All hospitality functions are now under Parish Life.
 - ii. Shirley DeMent urged congregants to visit the gift shop.
- k. Sharing Library: Dave DeMent
 - i. All encouraged to use the library. Mentioned that older books are donated to the St. Luke's Shower Program.
- l. Stephen Ministry: Elizabeth Spencer, Holly Graham and Father Michael
 - i. Continue to offer confidential support to those that are in need.
- m. Ushers: Malcolm Finney
 - i. Noted that ushers serve approximately one Sunday a month. Let him know if you are interested in helping.
- 4. Financial Summary & Budget: Fr. Michael Fincher
 - a. Income for 2024 was approximately \$5,000 short; expenses were \$9,400 more than anticipated (mostly due to unforeseen buildings and grounds issues) for an approximate \$15,000 shortfall for the year 2024. The shortfall was covered by funds from our reserves.
 - b. 2025 budget
 - i. Budget is largely based on actuals from 2024.
 - ii. Includes salary increases for all staff of 2.5%, consistent with diocesan and Federal guidelines. Providing annual cost-of-living increases is now standard diocesan policy.
 - iii. Mother Sharon's salary during Fr. Michael's sabbatical will come from reserves. Outside the sabbatical months, she will assist one Sunday per month and there are some funds in the budget for that.
 - iv. To make a balanced budget we need approximately \$269,000 in pledges. We are currently about \$5,000 short. If all those who pledged in the past continue to pledge at the same level, we should have a total of \$272,000.
 - v. The air conditioning unit is a looming issue. We now have a preventative maintenance agreement, and the unit is being assessed to determine if it needs to be replaced. If so, it will need to be determined how we will pay for it.
 - vi. We have changed the way we audit our finances each year due to a large increase in the proposed fee by an external auditor. Now the audit will be performed by an internal committee.
- 5. Stewardship: Holly Graham
 - a. Pledges account for almost ¾ of our income. To date we have commitments for \$263,642 from 80 pledges. 14 of these are new pledges and 28 pledges were increased.
 - b. If you have not yet returned your pledge card, please do so.
- F. Appointments
 - 1. John Mora was appointed Senior Warden.
 - 2. Holly Graham will continue as Altar Guild Director.
- G. Decommissioning of Outgoing Vestry Members: Carol Roberts-Corb, Holly Graham, Charlotte Nelson

H. Commissioning of New Leaders

1. New Vestry Members: Carol Bernstein, Beth Eldon, Cheryl Rodi
2. Continuing Vestry Members: Malcolm Finney, John Mora, Elizabeth Spencer, Caryn Cobb, Fred Cornett, and Abby Koerkenmeier
2. Delegates to the Diocesan Convention: Beth Eldon, Holly Graham, and Elizabeth Spencer (vestry rep). Other nominees will be alternates.

I. Adjournment: 11:53 AM

Motion to Adjourn: MSP Tamera Benedict/Sarah Spencer

Respectfully Submitted,
Carol Roberts-Corb

PARISH DATA FOR 2025

Average Sunday Eucharist Attendance (In-person + Online)-----	116
Average Thursday Eucharist Attendance (In-person) -----	8
Average Weekday Morning and Evening Prayer Attendance (Online)-----	13
Average Tuesday Centering Prayer Attendance (Online) -----	6
Average Thursday Bible Study Attendance -----	13
Easter Attendance (Great Vigil + Easter Day, In-person + Online) -----	306
Christmas Attendance (Christmas Eve + Christmas Day, In-person + Online)-----	168
Baptisms-----	1
Confirmations -----	0
Weddings-----	0
Transfers into St. Gregory's-----	0
Other Additions to St. Gregory's -----	11
Deaths-----	9
Transfers out of St. Gregory's -----	0

PROFILES OF VESTRY CANDIDATES

Colleen Ahland

Years at St. Gregory's: 4 years

How have you been involved in St. Gregory's congregation and your personal community?

We've attended regularly in person since Ash Wednesday, 2022, and online since 2021. My husband and I both teach at the university and my son is now a sophomore in high school. Before my son entered high school, I regularly volunteered at my son's K-8 school, Newcomb Academy. I also taught Sunday school at my previous church.

What skills/gifts would you bring to the Vestry? Be sure to include personal and professional experience and expertise that you bring to the office.

I previously served on the vestry at another church in Long Beach for 3 years.

Why do you want to be a member of the Vestry?

I'd like to serve my church in some capacity

Is there anything else you want to share with us?

I'm excited to get more involved at St. Gregory's

Kimberly Bouzguenda

Years at St. Gregory's: 4 years

How have you been involved in St. Gregory's congregation and your personal community?

I attend the 10:15 Sunday service, and watch on Facebook remotely when ill or traveling. I served as a Eucharistic Minister for one year and have been a lector for almost four years. I love to help with special events, trying to fit in wherever most needed – decorating for Easter, set up/tear down, carpools, etc. I have loved joining in our Lenten activities, walking between St. Thomas of Canterbury and St. Gregory's, praying for Long Beach, participating in the Lenten services and taking a slot with the Holy Sacrament during Prayer Vigil. I bring food items and bags for the Food Pantry, and participate in the Church Supper as often as I'm available to do so, hosting and co-hosting on several occasions. Most of all I try to notice any newcomers to our church, and introduce myself, then introduce them around and invite them to social hour, sit with them and try to make sure they feel comfortable and welcome to return. I also try to sit in different places each Sunday I'm in attendance, so I can get to know as many of my fellow parishioners as possible, to greet them, and love them and let them know they matter.

Outside of church I am also an active volunteer in my professional organization, Project Management International – Los Angeles Chapter, where I've previously served as the VP of Finance, and currently am serving my second year with the Programs Committee, co-hosting the Book Club and assisting with recruiting speakers and planning/executing chapter events. I'm also a very part-time volunteer with The Art of Living, where I take courses, serve as a Blessor, and am slowly working on becoming a volunteer teacher of breathwork and meditation, which I hope to one day bring here to Long Beach.

In addition to St. Gregory's I also financially support a student in Burkina Faso, whom I adopted in 2022 and committed to financing through his graduation in 2036, and donate monthly to KLOVE Christian Radio, The Art of Living, and KUSC.

I am passionate about homelessness. I was very active serving this community in Minnesota before moving to CA. After settling in West Los Angeles, I first served meals to the homeless population at All Saints Beverly Hills, and later worked through St. Bede's to provide a hot meal and packed lunches one weekend each month, and to provide access to showers and laundry services once each month, in collaboration with several Episcopal parishes and City organizations. I also served as a Financial Literacy Mentor for families coming out of homelessness, both in Minneapolis/St. Paul and in Los Angeles.

I served on the Vestry at my parish in St. Paul, MN for two terms and at my parish in West Los Angeles for one and half terms before moving down to Long Beach.

Most importantly, I keep items in the trunk of my car and cash in my wallet and do my utmost to be able to help people face-to-face, one on one, whenever possible to show them the Love of Christ and to, as St. Francis is purported to have said, "preach the gospel at all times, and only when absolutely necessary, use words." I try to exhibit this in my day to day life in my neighborhood, and wherever I am, trying to treat others with the love of Christ.

What skills/gifts would you bring to the Vestry? Be sure to include personal and professional experience and expertise that you bring to the office.

As stated above, I have experience serving on various church vestries over the past 20 years and have been volunteering at my home church with unbroken regularity since the age of 12. I have volunteered with at least one and often up to three organizations annually, as a lifestyle, even when I was a single mother of four, and I raised four children to adulthood, all of whom now volunteer in their own communities, serve in their churches or are serving in public office.

Most of my volunteerism has been related to providing material assistance, housing, financing/fund raising and financial literacy education to homeless neighbors, to those emerging from homelessness or experiencing housing or food insecurity (Meals on Wheels, Food Shelves), tutoring for underprivileged or non-English speaking populations (ESL and tutoring in reading), professional organizations (finance, marketing, program development), social justice related political activism, organizations that try to protect our environment (Tree People), and organizations that support the arts (Friends of the Library, MN Opera, LA Opera, Public Broadcasting).

I am good with people, children and animals. I authentically love people. I'm good with finance related tasks. I'm a good organizer, communicator, and motivator. I'm a good facilitator, and I'm good at editing. I'm not afraid of public speaking or talking to strangers. I'm good at building collaboration and convincing people they'd like to cooperate and participate. I'm friendly, personable, relatable, trustworthy, well-spoken and hard to say no to. Sometimes I have good ideas or fresh perspectives for looking at things, which can be useful.

Why do you want to be a member of the Vestry?

I believe Christians are called to serve and that as humans we are built for community. I want to see my communities thrive and I believe we are our best when we are participating in community. My skills, such as they are, are a gift from G-d which I have been taught I should not squander or take for granted. When I go to meet my maker, I hope to have been sufficiently faithful to His/Her call to be a good and faithful servant.

As a mother of adult children, my only remaining way to “teach” them anything is by example. I want to demonstrate by my example that our ability to impact our world never stops being important and worthy of our effort and intention.

As a member of St. Gregory’s I receive inestimable value every day from my community, and I wish to give back, to participate in and to support that culture of community. I love St. Gregory’s and I know that where there are many hands, the work is lighter. We should all take turns.

Is there anything else you want to share with us?

I have missed being on a vestry. It’s something I appreciate and enjoy almost as much as lectoring. I’ve been eager to volunteer for the vestry since my arrival 4 years ago. My first visit to St. Gregory’s was on the Feb 2022 Annual Meeting. I knew then that this was the parish I would join and that I wanted to do this, but I needed time to heal, having just gone through a big move, a lay-off, empty nesting, serious illness, and the loss of my mother and step-father within 4 months. I was struggling and not in a position to take this on. But I’m ready now. I’m grateful for this opportunity to be considered for this privilege. Thank you for inviting me to be nominated. If I’m elected to participate, I will do so with my whole heart and sincerest effort.

Holly Graham

Years at St. Gregory’s: 53 years (this is not a typo)

How have you been involved in St. Gregory’s congregation and your personal community?

Over the years, I have been a Sunday School teacher, a LEM, a Lay Eucharistic Visitor, a choir member. I have been the Stewardship Chair for three years, I am on the Parish Life committee, I am currently the Directress of the Altar Guild and have served on the Vestry previously. While on the Vestry previously, I have been the Junior and Senior Warden.

What skills/gifts would you bring to the Vestry? Be sure to include personal and professional experience and expertise that you bring to the office.

Welcoming people, helping them feel comfortable and sharing my Christian values with others, makes my heart happy. For several years, I served on the board of the Orange County Child Abuse Prevention Center. During that time, I also worked with clients in the community, helping young mothers adjust to motherhood. In my profession, I have to be well-organized and must be quick on my feet. I am well- organized and am willing to take on almost anything for our parish community. I feel that I work well in a group setting and will take on the responsibility of getting things done for our parish.

Why do you want to be a member of the Vestry?

My commitment to St. Gregory’s parish keeps me motivated to move our parish forward— whether that’s getting people involved, working through important church business or supporting another person on his or her Christian journey. I consistently attempt to build good connections with new and existing church members. As I’ve said before, it is my hope and prayer that the Vestry continue to nurture the love of Christ at St. Gregory’s and lead us into the new and exciting future that beckons us. I’d like to be a part of that journey if elected to the Vestry this year.

Is there anything else you want to share with us?

Deeply thankful am I to be considered for the Vestry position.

David Luebben-Morrill

Years at St. Gregory's: 41.5 years

How have you been involved in St. Gregory's congregation and your personal community?

I have served the congregation as a Lay Eucharistic Minister, Torch Bearer, Acolyte, Crucifer, Altar Guild Member, Youth Assistant, Chaperone, Usher at Music at 4, Men's Fellowship, doing Security for Church Rummage Sale, and on Hospitality Committee. For the community, I have served as Volunteers Neighborhood Security for July 4th Parade (Los Alamitos), Caring for Seniors, Caring for Animals, and Volunteer for School Events and Sports.

What skills/gifts would you bring to the Vestry? Be sure to include personal and professional experience and expertise that you bring to the office.

Some of the professional skills I bring to the Vestry are skills I have developed from working for a school district like doing school security, high school sports official, Landscaping, Operation of large machinery and vehicles. These skills, I would use to help keep our campus secure, properly maintained and the congregation safe. With maintenance being an everyday project and another way to keep congregation safe, I will use my skills as Grounds Maintenance Worker to check, make recommendations and help with repair and maintenance for our campus. I also use these skills at home and to help neighbors.

Why do you want to be a member of the Vestry?

I enjoy working with people and I stop to listen and talk to people. If someone has problems, I will do what I can such as moving a box or fixing something. One of important things is the responsibility is to lock up the church. I take that seriously. The last thing is that I am learning new things and I will continue learning combined with knowledge from being on the Vestry before.

Is there anything else you want to share with us?

I am thankful to be asked to run for Vestry. I feel thankful to serve God in this Church.

Alice O'Keefe

Years at St. Gregory's: 15 years

How have you been involved in St. Gregory's congregation and your personal community?

I am involved at St. Gregory's as a choir member, a receivables treasurer, a lector, a member of the Finance Committee, and recently took over the responsibility of entering receivables into the computer and producing contribution statements. In the past I have been on the Food Bank committee, a LEM and a member of the Vestry. I support my community by volunteering with the Anaheim Police Department (APD) and as a member of CERT (Citizens Emergency Response Team) through the Anaheim Fire Department. As a volunteer with APD, I conduct motor patrols, visit home bound citizens, conduct vacation house checks, am the Editor of the

Volunteer Newsletter, and work in the office supporting Homicide and the Community Policing Teams. I am also a Certified Tourism Ambassador™ (CTA). As an APD representative, I conduct foot patrols with a partner in the Anaheim Tourism district near and around Disneyland contacting the public and businesses in a PR effort and to offer help with issues. As a CERT member, I attend monthly emergency first aid and rescue training sessions and am certified in CPR. I am also studying to get my Ham Radio license. In addition, I work various police and fire department community events.

What skills/gifts would you bring to the Vestry? Be sure to include personal and professional experience and expertise that you bring to the office.

Some of the skills I would bring to the Vestry include accounting, financial and computer experience, as well as organizational and leadership skills.

My professional background is in Information Technology.

Both my BA and MS degrees are in Computer Science. I started out as a cost accountant, but it wasn't long before I branched into the IT world when I was asked to convert the manual business applications into electronic applications. Eventually, I became an IT manager, a career that lasted for 30 plus years working in Aerospace and Health Care industries. Personally, I was on the Board of Directors and was Treasurer of the Anaheim Performing Arts Foundation for several years. As Treasurer I was responsible for managing bank accounts, reconciling statements, handling payments and receivables, and preparing financial reports. I also worked multiple fund-raising events .

Why do you want to be a member of the Vestry?

I consider it an honor to run for the vestry and appreciate the opportunity. I would like to be a member because I want to be more involved in the workings of the church and in the decision making. St Gregory's is an important part of my life, and I want to do what I can to continue making it flourish.

Is there anything else you want to share with us?

I have 3 sons who I am very proud of and 7 terrific grandchildren. I am an animal lover and have 5 cats. Sadly, my retired K9 passed at 13 years old last year. He worked for the L.A. County Sheriff's Department for 8 years before retiring. My hobbies include playing the guitar and piano, jigsaw puzzles, crossword puzzles, reading and going to plays.

RECTOR'S REPORT

I have to say, 2025 was a year like no other. Well, of course, every year is unique, and we have had some pretty unusual years during my nine years as Rector of St. Gregory's (the pandemic years being among the most unusual in more ways than one). As I look back and do a review of this past year, it actually feels more like three distinct years all rolled into one. Which, in some ways, it was. The first third of the year was focused on pre-sabbatical preparations. The second third was my—and in many ways, our—sabbatical. And then the final third was life post-sabbatical. Each of these having a distinct feel, at least in my own mind and in my work.

PRE-SABBATICAL

Between the beginning of the year and the end of April, my personal attention, as well as much of the attention of our parish life, was focused on my impending sabbatical. Aside from all the planning and logistics that go into such an endeavor, one of the greatest challenges for me was finding someone to cover for the nearly four-month period that I would be away. I would not entrust my beloved parish and parishioners to just anyone, you know. I kept going over in my mind who of the retired clergy I know might be a good fit or who would be willing to commit to such a four-month obligation. I really was not making much progress on that front, until Mother Sharon Sheffield informed me that she was leaving St. Thomas of Canterbury at the end of January and wanted to know if I would be open to having her do sabbatical coverage. This was perfect, since she was well-known to most of you, having been raised up to ministry by St. Gregory's, and then in more recent years with the shared ministry between St. Gregory's and St. Thomas of Canterbury. So, over the next few months, Mother Sharon and I worked to identify a scope of the work for what would be required during my absence.

We came up with a schedule of Mother Sharon being with us one Sunday a month in February and March, and then about half-time in April as we prepared for the transition to sabbatical coverage. It worked well having the two of us available to help with Holy Week and Easter, adding to the richness of the varied services; not to mention the reduced work for any one priest, particularly as we prepared for a major shift during sabbatical. Plus, increasing Mother Sharon's time during April helped signal in a tangible way the transition to sabbatical time. Then, on Sunday, April 27th, I did both services, with Sharon present to do a litany of leave-taking. And with that, I was off.

SABBATICAL

Since I was not here for nearly four months, I cannot speak to life at St. Gregory's during my sabbatical. Although I do know that Mother Sharon led a four-month study of Sr. Joan Chittister's book *The Rule of Benedict: A Spirituality for the 21st Century*. This was a study she had been wanting to do, and one that fit very nicely with one aspect of my sabbatical: monastic community and how that can inform our own spiritual journeys. This study was a great way for parishioners to journey with me on my sabbatical, and for me to continue to be connected with the parish by following along in the daily readings and reflections as part of my sabbatical rhythm and practices.

As for my activities during sabbatical, I will not go into too much detail, largely because I did send several reports while away. Those reports contained a summary of what I was doing, as

well as some of the insights gained during my time away. But just to give the thumbnail, my time away was structured as follows:

- April 28 through May 2 = Annual “cousin’s week,” which was a four-day cruise to Catalina and Ensenada.
- Home for about a week and a half.
- May 12 through May 24 = Trip to New Mexico, including driving to New Mexico, five days at Monastery of Christ in the Desert, followed by three days visiting friends in Albuquerque, then return home.
- Home for about two and a half weeks.
- June 11 to July 4 = Trip to Scotland, including a week on Iona followed by two weeks traveling around Scotland, including Glasgow, Inverness, Aberdeen, and various day trips in between to such places as the Highlands, Isle of Skye, and St. Andrew’s.
- Home for about two and a half weeks.
- July 23 to August 7 = Trip to New England, including three days at Society of St. John the Evangelist (which ended my sabbatical time). This time was primarily spent reflecting on my sabbatical, rereading my sabbatical journal entries, and attempting to process it all into a structured set of learning—almost a rule of life, of sorts. This was followed by vacation time in Massachusetts and Maine.
- Home for four days before returning to work on August 12.

The time at home between trips was hardly spent sitting around twiddling my thumbs. The routine I established, at least for the periods at home, was actually pretty simple. I did not want to structure my time too tightly, to the point that I felt beholden to the clock. My weekly at-home rhythm was similar to my regular work rhythm. I continued to view Monday as my Sabbath, as normal. Sundays were devoted to worship, just like normal. Only I was not the one doing the presiding or preaching. During sabbatical, I established Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Long Beach as my temporary parish home. I wanted to have a regular place to worship. And somehow it just seemed strange to pick one Episcopal parish for the four months. Since I already had a connection to Gloria Dei, being friends with the pastor and having been there a few times while on vacation, it seemed a good fit. And, admittedly, it was nice to be able to be somewhere that I could really feel a part of a community, even if only temporarily.

The remainder of the week was loosely scheduled, with time each day for reading and reflection. I had a few books I wanted to read, including:

- *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ* by Fleming Rutledge – 612 pages of “light reading”
- *Contemplative Vision: Photography as a Spiritual Practice* by Dirk Devries
- *Ordinary Mysticism: Your Life as Sacred Ground* by Mirabai Starr
- *The Universal Christ* by Richard Rohr

These were the primary books that were related more to my sabbatical interests. In addition, I read a number of other books for personal interest and pleasure.

In the front of my sabbatical journal, I wrote a quote by Martin Buber: “All journeys have secret destinations of which the traveler is unaware.” This proved to be quite appropriate for my sabbatical time. Destinations, real and metaphorical that I discovered during the course of my travels. Enhanced by the connections and relationships that formed throughout this time. And

the promptings and realizations that continue to arise from time to time, even as I have returned from sabbatical and returned to “real life.”

To summarize the sabbatical experience, I want to share one journal entry that highlights the ongoing nature of the sabbatical journey. On August 5, while in Portland, Maine, I wrote:

This morning, I visited St. Luke’s Episcopal Cathedral in downtown Portland. After visiting, I walked the labyrinth they have in front of the church. Have not walked a labyrinth in ages. Seemed very appropriate as my Sabbatical and vacation time come to an end. As I walked, I reflected on the similarities between labyrinths and pilgrimages—how both entail a physical journey that is intended to facilitate a deeper spiritual journey. I thought about how now that the outward physical journey comes to an end, the inward spiritual journey, the work of reflecting and processing what I learned and discovered on Sabbatical needs to continue. That much of the true incorporation of what I discovered, and likely additional insights, will occur as I return to my regular life and work. That those will hopefully be changed or somehow transformed by the Sabbatical discoveries. Walking the labyrinth is a sacramental act of making this a reality—I walked into the spiritual center through Sabbatical travels and experiences, and now I am in the process of walking back out of the labyrinth, back out of the Sabbatical time, into my ordinary life.

Even now, this journal entry reminds me that part of what sabbatical is about is exploring or discovering a new way of being post-sabbatical. The sabbatical work continues. And I continue to be amazed at the insights that arise, even now, months later.

In closing out the section on sabbatical, I just want to express my deepest thanks to the entire parish for the opportunity to take sabbatical and for your support in allowing it to happen. While sabbatical is a contractual obligation on the part of both parish and priest, it only really works when the parish and priest are able to work together to make it happen and to make it a meaningful experience for all involved. I am grateful to the Vestry, to John Mora (serving as Senior Warden) and to Mother Sharon for their guidance and leadership of the parish during my absence. And I am grateful to all of our parishioners for your graciousness and for your emotional and spiritual support of me during the preparations for my sabbatical, during my time away, and upon re-entry. You are truly an amazing group of people!

POST-SABBATICAL

After being away for nearly four months, I was definitely ready to return to the regular rhythm of parish ministry—chaotic though it may be at times. I am very much a creature of habit and routine. And while I loved the freedom and flexibility that being away afforded, I am grateful for the return to a more normal way of being. Returning to the normal schedule of worship services and parish duties.

Sadly, that was all upended a bit when, at the beginning of October, Kevin Wood, our Parish Administrator of nearly nine years, tendered his resignation effective October 31. The parting was on good terms. Kevin merely wanted to devote more time to his music career and to other personal pursuits. I cannot blame him for that and am most appreciative of all he has done for St. Gregory’s during his time with us—graciously stepping in when Allen Ronk-LaFoe, the Parish Administrator when I first came to St. Gregory’s, had his medical emergency and subsequently died, helping me to reshape and streamline Parish Office functions to increase efficiency.

The latter part of the year has been spent with me having to do double duty: my own job, as well as the additional parish administration work. Of course, none of this is what I envisioned, nor what I would have hoped for post-sabbatical. Particularly since I had been so intentional about shifting a number of responsibilities over to Kevin in preparation for my sabbatical. And now those things are back on my plate. And then some.

For the time being, we are finding ways of making it all work. And, of course, I continue the search for a new Parish Administrator. While it has not been easy, and has been, at times, frustrating, I continue to have faith that God will provide the right person in due course.

OUR COMMON LIFE

Despite feeling like three separate and distinct years all rolled into one, there were common themes running throughout the year, as well. After all, even in the midst of the periodic shifts in parish rhythms and activities, the primary work and ministries of St. Gregory's continued: our worship; our educational programs; outreach projects, including our signature Feeding Programs; and our Parish Life and hospitality functions. Undergirding all of these are the people of St. Gregory's. The people who make all this possible and who keep the parish running. After all, we are first and foremost a collection of unique individuals who have chosen to come together in this place for a common purpose: to be God's kingdom in this place, at this time.

As with any such collection of individuals, we have experienced changes in membership over the past year. We have been blessed to see some growth among our parishioners. On All Saints Sunday, we baptized Juhani Palomaki into the Body of Christ. And throughout the year, we have had a number of people join our parish family. All adding to the richness of who we are. And sadly, we also experienced a number of losses in 2025 with the deaths of David Feit-Pretzer, Barbara Smuck, Betty Lang, Karen McDonough, Kathy Stein, Nora Lee Fleming, Margo Dalessi, Barbara Cleantis, and Walt Gupton. The first four of these occurring in just over a three-week period right before Holy Week—a little too much, ever for our resilient parish. And all of them being sad and terrible losses to the community. But even in the midst of the grief associated with these losses, we celebrate their contributions to our parish and to God's kingdom.

As we move into a new year, I am nurtured and uplifted by all of you, by the spirits of those who have gone before, by the experiences I had on sabbatical, and the insights that continue to arise unexpectedly, assuring me that even in the midst of challenges, God is with us and continues to guide us into the fullness of who call us to be as the people of St. Gregory's Parish.

Blessings,
Fr. Michael Fincher
Rector

SENIOR WARDEN'S REPORT

During the past year of 2025, we began the year celebrating memorial services, saying goodbye to dear friends from our congregation. Although emotional, it was a joy to see how so many people came together to make sure that these memorial services were special for the families.

This was also the year our Rector, Father Michael, took a well-deserved sabbatical. While he was away for four months, Mother Sharon Sheffield served as our substitute rector, performing her duties with great enthusiasm and joy. During this same time the vestry worked as a team to ensure that the church continued to operate as normal for our community and congregation.

One of this year's highlights was the ongoing success of our music program led by Choir Director David York. So many in our community enjoy the excellent Music at Four Program. Also, we have continued to see new families and individuals choosing Saint Gregory's to celebrate services and volunteer their time.

Numerous ministry programs demonstrated strong performance throughout 2025. The outreach program continued their efforts to receive offerings from the congregation which served different programs in our community. The individuals volunteering in our Feed My Lambs and Food Bank continued to be diligent with success in serving our less fortunate each month.

Congregation volunteers with their time and expertise completed audits for 2023 and 2024, saving significant costs over hiring consultants. We appreciate their efforts.

Even though we had much to celebrate, the year still held challenges. Maintenance continues to be an ongoing work in progress. During the rainy season, we needed to repair the church roof several times and will likely need more repairs in the future. Good news: we've found a company that responds quickly to repair needs. Lighting is another area that requires continuous attention. The largest challenge of all is our churches' HVAC system. The HVAC in the sanctuary is original (installed in 1967) and it has been limping along with repairs and prayers. The time is coming when the system will finally need to be replaced.

Now, I would like to thank everyone in the congregation who worked during the year to make St. Gregory's a warm and welcoming church. I would especially like to thank the other members of the vestry who worked diligently at their different ministries and responsibly performed their duties to be good stewards for St. Gregory's. I feel fortunate to have had the support of such an amazing group throughout my time as Senior Warden.

With love and gratitude,
John F. Mora
Senior Warden

MINISTRY REPORTS

ALTAR GUILD

St. Gregory's Altar Guild is responsible for beautifying and cleaning the church and setting up for church services, including decorating for holiday services, weddings and funerals. We care for candles, arrange flowers, clean Communion vessels, care for vestments, and most importantly, assist Father Michael and visiting clergy. For Palm Sunday the guild folds and prepares palm crosses. All parishioners are welcome to assist us with this most enjoyable task.

The Guild is composed of four teams, each headed up by a Team Captain. Each team serves for a two-week period, then is "off" for six weeks. The rotation is smooth and we all work well together performing our duties.

Our operating funds come mostly through Christmas and Easter flower donations. These donations help fund the purchase of new linens, weekly sanctuary flowers, repairs, and service supplies. We are in need of weekly flower donations. The cost of a weekly arrangement is about \$125.00. If you would like to enhance our worship space by your donation, please speak to an Altar Guild member or the parish office. As we move into the new year, we will be operating in our team rotations. It is always a blessing to be working with a full complement of members. This year, we are welcoming 2 new members who are currently in training, and as always, we welcome any new members.

I must give a big thank you to all parishioners, members of the choir and others, who have so generously donated their time in helping lift things that had to be lifted, cleaned things that had to be cleaned, helped put away things that needed to be put away, and assisting us in any way, to make our worship space more beautiful.

Respectfully submitted,
Holly Gergen Graham
Altar Guild Directress

BIBLE STUDY

Bible study meets in the Fireside Room each Thursday morning beginning at 11 AM. Fr. Michael is our leader.

Fr. Michael was on sabbatical from late April until about the middle of August. During that time, we temporarily put our study of the book of James on hold, and with the guidance and leadership of Mother Sharon Sheffield, we turned our attention to studying *The Rule of Benedict*. The change was very well received and our attendance increased. Bible Study extends a heartfelt thank you to Mother Sharon for her guidance and leadership through that time.

Bible study is a devotional time of prayer and bible reading all wrapped up with in-depth discussions about the book we are studying. Underneath all of this "study" and discussion is a rich, warm, inviting fellowship. Our focus is on Jesus. The bible is our textbook. Bibles are available for your use, or you may bring your own.

Everyone is welcome, applauded and spiritually fed. We are saving a seat for you. Please join us.

Respectfully submitted,
Thursday morning Bible Study

BUILDINGS & GROUNDS

As always 2025 continued to be a year where maintenance for our wonderful campus continued to keep the buildings & grounds group busy. We once again worked and spent funds on a scope of projects that were both big and small but were important to our congregation in keeping our church running smoothly. Below is a list of items and projects that were accomplished during 2025.

- We needed to deal with a small intrusion of little critters that wanted to make their homes in our church. Our contractor Terminix was successful in ridding our church of this problem.
- We continued to spend funds on repairing more roof leaks found in our church after each rainy event during the year.
- Ceiling tiles in several rooms needed replacing due to water damage.
- Rain gutters were cleared of debris that had accumulated over time.
- A large amount of maintenance funds were spent completing items listed in an audit performed by our property insurance provider. It is important to note that the list of numerous items needed to be completed in order to keep our insurance enforced.
- Outside lighting in different areas of the campus needed to have multiple bulbs replaced.
- Two doors in the church needed to have the panic bars completely replaced. The door from the church to the choir room needed additional repairs to plug holes because of a different closing mechanism. The door will need to be stripped and repainted in the new year.
- Locks were installed on the outside restrooms when it was discovered that some of the homeless in the area were using the unlocked restrooms when the church was closed.
- "Fix it Fred" continued to be an important asset to the church by repairing table legs on the Fireside Room conference table, and by steam cleaning the rugs in the Fireside room, the Rector's office, and the church.
- Francis Hall had the floor stripped and waxed after we had some groups abuse the use of the hall during several public rental celebrations.
- Several electrical plugs and switches were replaced in rooms around the campus.
- The campus was power-washed several times during the year.
- Work was begun on cleaning out the janitor's closet, but needs to be completed.
- The church HVAC continued to have preventative maintenance performed during the year. However, we did have some issues that required additional services by our air conditioner contractor.

Submitted by John Mora and Fred Cornett

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

2025 was another dynamic year for St. Gregory's Christian Education Program. We continue to welcome new families to St. Gregory's specifically because we offer programming for children. We have experienced record-breaking attendance in both Nursery and Sunday School! This growth shows that when a parish offers a strong Christian education program, families respond.

Nursery Update

Dina Garcia has continued to serve as our full-time Nursery Attendant and has been an absolute blessing to our children under age five. Dina will be graduating from Cal State Long Beach in May 2026 and will be leaving her position at that time. We have been incredibly fortunate to have her care and dedication, and she has graciously helped us search for her replacement—though we have not yet found one. We are actively seeking a paid Nursery Attendant to provide childcare for children ages 1–5 during the 8:00 a.m. and 10:15 a.m. services. Please help us spread the word so we can continue to offer this vital ministry.

Sunday School Structure

We currently have three Sunday School cohorts, all meeting in the Youth Room off the Parish Hall:

- **Beginners:** Grades K–2, 10:15–11:00 a.m.
- **Juniors:** Grades 3–5, 10:15–11:00 a.m.
- **Seniors:** Grades 6–12, 9:30–10:15 a.m.

We pivoted to three classes this year due to new families joining with children in the Grades 3–5 range. The Beginners and Juniors currently operate in a “one-room schoolhouse” setting, separated by a temporary partition. The Junior class has recently doubled in size, and we anticipate needing an additional classroom soon.

As our program grows, we will also need additional volunteers to maintain our required two adults per class for youth protection. **Please consider volunteering if you are able.**

Music in Sunday School

We were able to incorporate music into the Sunday School curriculum this year, with the support of David York, Music Director. He has provided music for the Presentation Hymns, with the goal of helping children participate more fully in worship.

Seniors Sunday School

The Seniors Sunday School class meets Sundays from 9:30–10:15 a.m. in the Youth Room and is facilitated by Dana Lindsay and Tamera Benedict. The curriculum aligns with the other classes and focuses on reviewing key Bible stories to strengthen biblical knowledge.

Volunteers: The Heart of the Program

If volunteering in Sunday School or Nursery is something you would like to try, please let us know—there is always room for one more! You can contact Dana Lindsay or Tamera Benedict. Because we require two adults in each class for youth protection, our volunteers are essential to the care of our children. We are deeply grateful to:

Susan Mora, Kris Brooks, Elizabeth Spencer, Janet McCormick, Carol Roberts-Corb, Shirley DeMent, Abby Koerkenmeier, Pat Oddie, Carol Bernstein, Caryn Cobb, and Dean Farrar.

With many hands, the work is lighter. Thanks to our generous volunteers, no one needs to serve more than one Sunday per month, and they are wonderful about covering for one another when needed. Volunteers do not need to teach—simply being present helps ensure a safe and nurturing environment for our children.

Sunday School Calendar

Sunday School meets every Sunday **except** the following dates (or as otherwise announced):

- **Thanksgiving Week (Nov 22–30):** No Sunday School on Nov 23 or Nov 30
- **Christmas:** No Sunday School on Dec 28
- **New Year's Day:** No Sunday School on Jan 4, 2026
- **Easter Sunday (Apr 6, 2026):** No Sunday School (all are invited to help with or participate in the Easter Egg Hunt)
- **Mother's Day (May 10):** No Sunday School
- **Memorial Day (May 25):** No Sunday School
- **Father's Day (June 21):** No Sunday School
- **July & August:** No Sunday School
- **Labor Day (Sept 7):** No Sunday School
- **Sunday, Sept 13:** First Day of Sunday School 2026

With Gratitude

Respectfully submitted by Dana Lindsay and Tamera Benedict

FOOD BANK & FEED MY LAMBS

Our St. Gregory's feeding programs are funded by donations directly to the Feeding Programs Fund, not through parishioners' regular pledges or the church budget. We appreciate the congregation's enthusiastic support of these vital programs, both of cash and in-kind donations, so please consider St. Gregory's Feeding Programs when choosing charities to support. You can make donations by check, separate from your regular pledge, made out to St. Gregory's with "Feeding Programs" in the memo and through the online portal on the website or the QR code in the bulletin every week. During 2025, fund spent \$19,485.63 and took in \$16,328.39. This was for the food we provide as well as donations such as socks, belts, backpacks, and blankets.

Our expenses have slowly eaten away at the surplus we built up during the pandemic, so that we have cut back on some non-food expenses and the number of bags provided to DAYS Long Beach; a request late in the year brought in additional donations from the congregation, for which we are grateful.

Our **Food Bank** continues to serve the local community as one of the larger elements of our Outreach program. We have again received several generous donations of food from the East Long Beach Stake of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and their Bishop's Pantry, as well as from other groups who use our facilities and expressed a desire to assist. In December, we applied for and received \$1,000 from a City of Long Beach emergency feeding fund, and also applied to the Los Angeles Area Food Bank and were given 170 prepackaged boxes of groceries (we were awarded three pallets but could only handle two at 1,300+ pounds each).

In 2025, we provided 794 bags of groceries during our monthly distributions, 111 more than in 2024, for an average of over 66 bags per month. We have seen a continuous increase in the

number of clients coming to us, especially toward the latter part of the year. We have continued our partnership with DAYS Long Beach; for over 50 years, DAYS Long Beach has supported low-income, under-served families in Long Beach. DAYS Long Beach supports achievement by providing children and families with opportunities to develop skills, apply concepts they have learned, and build positive relationships. We are now providing 25 bags of staples to DAYS each month. In addition to our monthly distribution on the third Wednesday of the month, bags are given out when needy individuals ask at the church office during the month. Our banners are put out the weekend before each distribution and continue to bring in new clients.

Feed My Lambs Ministry Update

Feed My Lambs has been generously supported by St. Gregory's parishioners since 2004 through monetary, clothing, and food donations. Due to increased need, we have increased the number of people we feed to approximately 140 in 2025. We serve at our sister church, St. Luke's, on the first Saturday of every month.

We provide coffee, hot chocolate, and pastries, as well as a sack lunch and a cup of warm soup with crackers. Our guests continue to be happy with the bologna and cheese sandwich. Each lunch also includes hard-boiled eggs, a banana, a bottle of water, chips, and homemade cookies from the congregation (we could use more of these, please!).

Work Party Update

Our work party hours have changed. We now work Friday afternoon only, no longer on Thursdays, the day before the Saturday food service. On Fridays, cookies are sorted and bagged by Diane Kela and her crew—more than 400 cookies donated by parishioners. That same afternoon, we pack the lunches.

Cookie Donations Needed

We do need more cookie makers. Cookies may be brought in at any time in Ziploc bags marked "FML" or "Feed My Lambs," and we can store them in the freezer. Please let Tamera Benedict or Diane Kela know when you have brought cookies, so we know to look for them.

Simplicity is our friend when making cookies. We have guests with food sensitivities and allergies, so simpler cookies are best. Each year, we purchase a few cases of Girl Scout Cookies when we are short, but it would be wonderful to avoid that additional expense.

Egg Volunteers Needed

The congregation continues to generously provide 12–15 dozen hard-boiled eggs each month. We could really use more volunteers to help with egg preparation. Please contact Tamera Benedict at (562) 300-6800 if you are interested. Timing is critical—if eggs are brought in too early or too late, we are unable to use them for Feed My Lambs, if you are interested in helping with the eggs, Tamera needs you to coordinate with her.

With Grateful Thanks

Our volunteer crews have changed a bit over the past year; we have had to add an early Saturday morning crew to help load out of St. Gregory's to get down to St. Luke's. And a parishioner from St. Thomas has joined our merry band, Lainy Kagy. We are deeply grateful for our volunteer crew's faithful service:

Ashley & Charlie Cosgrove, Beth Eldon, Blair Carty, Caryn Cobb, Charlotte Nelson, Dana Lindsay, Diane Kela, Evelyn Jimenez, Greg & James Benedict, Kim Johnson, Lainy Kagy, Lea May, Lurlie Edgecomb, Marina Tesla, Fr. Michael Fincher, Mitzi Baldwin, Sharon Sheffield, Shirley Lyddon, Rick Crowe, John & Susan Mora, Matt Gruca, Mike Canzoneri, and Fred Cornett. I apologize if I have left anyone out. It truly takes a village, and we are so grateful for every one of you.

Our clients are always grateful and gracious. Thank you all for your kind and generous support of these two very important Outreach Ministries.

Jesus asked, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs. Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go."

(John 21:17–18)

Submitted by Bill Eldon and Tamera Benedict

GREETERS

Hi everyone! My name is Susan Mora and I am one of the luckiest team leaders in the church! I have a group of long-term, dedicated and loyal people who regularly cover their shifts with very few meetings or other obligations. Greeters' duties are saying "hello" or "goodbye" to everyone who enters or exits the church. This is a ministry that can be easily done, even if you are already in other church groups. Our impact in church is that we may be the first person that congregants and visitors interact with and who make a positive initial impression. Also, Greeters get to benefit from their service by being able to connect names with faces, often from passing out name tags to members, or relaying questions from congregants to connected personnel. Plus, being a Greeter does not require a large time commitment. Greeters start about 20 minutes before the start of the service on their scheduled day, and finish 10 to 15 minutes after the service, averaging one Sunday per month. We have openings now for several new greeters. Come join this valuable group by contacting Susan Mora at (310) 894-0731 or any other active Greeter. We welcome you!

Submitted by Susan Mora

MEN'S FELLOWSHIP

Men's Fellowship in 2025 met via Zoom every other month on the third Thursday. The meeting has been moved from 6:30 PM to 4:30 PM to accommodate members joining from central and eastern regions. The men of St. Gregory's helped cook pancakes on Shrove Tuesday and have been asked again for 2026. St. Gregory's also maintains fellowship with members of St. Thomas of Canterbury when we meet the second Saturday of each month for breakfast at Denny's in Lakewood. This meeting is open to every man of St. Gregory's, and we enjoy anyone who would like to attend.

Submitted by John Mora

MUSIC MINISTRY

CHOIR & SECTION LEADERS

Choir members devote many hours each month in rehearsal to prepare for Sunday worship and special services. We appreciate their commitment and dedication to providing quality musical leadership. The choir continues to grow, with 23 regular members and several additional seasonal singers. (New singers are always welcome!)

Soprano: Sally Curry, Barbara Garrett, Holly Graham, Fran Luebben-Morgan, Lindee McTigue, Alice O'Keefe, Anita Perreten, Ellen Ramsdell, Brianna Zucker*

Alto: Sharon Burgess, Beth Eldon, Darlene Feit-Pretzer, Andrea Hilliard*, Lisa Klig, Jan Rosson, Daisy Santos, Lizz Spencer

Tenor: Casey Ramsdell, Richard Ullrich, Dylan Wicks*

Bass: Bill Eldon, Don Hilliard, Michael Martin, Ray Rosson, Jordan Tickner*

We are fortunate to have talented choir section leaders who support the choir volunteers, offer solos and serve as cantors and instrumentalists. The four singers: Brianna Zucker, Andrea Hilliard, Dylan Wicks and Jordan Tickner, are funded through the church budget and gifts to Friends of Music.

MUSIC AT FOUR

The Music at Four concert series was a tremendous success this year, offering a variety of exciting events each month. Highlights included performances by Up Close and Classical, cellist Daniel Smith, Music from Bali, pianist Althea Waites, and Bach for Strings. The average concert attendance for the season was 77. An incredible \$19, 500 was donated in support of the music program!

Special thanks to Diane Kela, Lizz Spencer and their crew for wonderful receptions each month and to Cheryl Rodi and others for ushering and providing a warm welcome to guests. The monthly concert series is offered as a gift to the community, while introducing St. Gregory's to those who may be searching for a church home. Your financial gifts support this important ministry. **We appreciate your generosity!**

SPECIAL EVENTS

The 10 musicians of St. Gregory's Brass played several times throughout the year, and the South Coast Brass enhanced the Easter and Christmas services. A handbell/hand chime ensemble, which included some of our youngest members, performed twice.

St. Gregory's Choir presented an Epiphany Service of Lessons and Carols, a service of music celebrating Angels in the Life of Christ, the Robert Ray Gospel Mass with bass and percussion, and the popular Kirkin' of the Tartan Evensong service with Julie Ramsey conducting. December events included a Service of Lessons and Carols for Advent and a Christmas concert on the theme "An International Christmas Celebration."

INSTRUMENTALISTS

How lucky we are to have gifted instrumentalists participate regularly in our services. A special word of thanks to the multi-talented Sean Dunnahoe and to cellist George Bullock.

It's a privilege and pleasure to serve as Music Director at St. Gregory's. I've appreciated the strong support of the congregation and clergy throughout the year. Thank you.

David York

OUTREACH COMMITTEE

The beginning of 2025 was devastating for many of our siblings in Christ affected by the fires in Altadena and Pacific Palisades; therefore, we donated \$2,300 to the fire relief program sponsored through the Diocese and an additional \$1,000 to Pasadena Humane Society.

We expanded our in-reach card writing program for those known to need a little boost. The team primarily uses the prayer list and word of mouth for recipients.

We again ran several collection drives to help our neighbors in need. We collected 131 pairs of socks for the St. Luke's shower program; formula, sundry supplies, and \$745 for new mothers; and provided a wide variety of feminine hygiene products to St. Luke's and Lydia House.

Our annual backpack drive yielded 29 filled backpacks and \$1,000 for the children of Long Beach, which were distributed by the Long Beach Rescue Mission. The Long Beach Animal Shelter gratefully received over 190 containers of food and treats for dogs and cats, as well as ample toys, poop packs, litter material, and dishes for our 4-legged creatures of God. We wrapped up our year with \$5,535 worth of gift card donations for families served by the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health.

As always, through the generosity of our parish, we continue to be blessed to bless.

Respectfully submitted,
Dana Lindsay, Outreach Committee Chair

PARISH LIFE

Parish Life's mission is to contribute to the vitality and growth of the church community through caring attention to all social events and parishioners who attend the events. These events provide social opportunities to make friends and deepen relationships. Parish Life is responsible for helping to organize and to assist any parish group or ministry in their events or activities.

Below are some of the events we assisted with this year:

- Annual Meeting Luncheon
- Easter Sunday coffee hour
- Mass in The Grass
- Music at Four
- Annual Christmas Dinner

Funerals
Baptisms
Hospitality/Coffee Hour

We started the year off with some of our ministries hosting a Sunday coffee hour once a month. We will continue doing that this year and will be adding more ministries to the list.

We sent Father Michael off on his Sabbatical with a special coffee hour wishing him well and safe travels. We also welcomed in Mother Sharon Sheffield with a special coffee hour.

The head of our hospitality team became ill earlier in the year and was out for quite some time. The Parish Life team stepped up to take care of things and ensured everything ran smoothly until her return. Thank you to everyone who helped, your help was much needed and greatly appreciated.

We are so grateful to all those who helped with the Music at Four receptions, and the annual Christmas dinner set-up and clean-up. This gave the hospitality team a much-needed break. Many hands make light work.

As always, a big thank you to Diane Kela and her kitchen team, without whom none of this would be possible.

Respectfully Submitted
Elizabeth Spencer

STEPHEN MINISTRY

Our Stephen Ministry group has not been as active as we were before the pandemic, but we are willing to take care of those who are in need. Our caregivers share the love of Christ and spend their time with those people who are going through difficult times (after a loss of any kind or a difficult transition in their lives). We are there to listen, to hold hands, to offer comfort and to help reduce the stress and pain parishioners may experience after any type of loss.

If you, or anyone you know, would like a Stephen Ministry companion, please reach out to Father Michael. We have both male and female Stephen Ministers available to assist you through your journey.

Respectfully submitted,
Holly Gergen Graham
Co-Leader of Stephen Ministry

STEWARDSHIP

The “Tell Out My Soul” stewardship campaign ran from Sunday, October 5th through Sunday, November 23rd. Initial welcome letters along with an invitation and pledge card from Father Michael and the Committee Chairperson were sent out. Each Sunday during the campaign, parishioners shared their reflections on how the theme of the campaign has been played out in their lives and ministries at St. Gregory’s. Our stewardship speakers were David York, Lizz Spencer, Nita Scott, Kim Bouzguenda, and Jim Perreten. The pledges we received were then blessed on the last day of the campaign at the altar.

To date, we have received 77 pledges, with total commitments of \$248,910. We are thankful to all who have given so generously as we make our way into the new year. Of all pledges received, 35 were the same as last year, 28 increased, 9 decreased, and we had 5 new pledges. Pledge numbers and envelopes have been assigned and made available to our parishioners. End of year statements are being prepared to be mailed out.

It has been a blessing to have been the Stewardship Chair once again this year. Thank you all for being a part of our stewardship campaign.

Respectfully submitted,
Holly Gergen Graham
Stewardship Chair

USHERS

The primary responsibilities of ushers are welcoming, seating, and guiding and coordinating the movement of the congregation during a church service.

Teams of ushers serve at every regular service (ideally 2 ushers per team at 8:00 AM services and 3 – 4 ushers per team at 10:15 AM services). We currently have four teams of ushers with each team typically serving once a month at regular services. Ushers also serve at funerals, weddings, and other special services (Ash Wednesday, Holy Week, Easter Vigil, Christmas, etc.) during the year.

Adults and older youth are encouraged to be part of this important Ministry of Hospitality to the congregation. Training is provided for new Ushers by the leaders of the Usher Team to which you are assigned during a church. Please contact John Mora or any usher if you are interested in this ministry.

I want to take this opportunity to offer sincere thanks and appreciation to all the current ushers for their dedicative service to our congregation in 2025 and look forward to their continued service in 2026.

I also want to note that I will need to be stepping back from responsibility as Head Usher this year. John Mora will be taking on the role of Head Usher in 2026.

Malcolm Finney
Ushers Coordinator

FINANCIAL REPORTS

2025 FINANCIAL REPORT & 2026 BUDGET

	Actual	Actual	Actual	Budget	Actual	Budget
Operating Costs	2022	2023	2024	2025	2025	2026
Rector	82,133	82,133	88,704	90,922	90,922	93,500
Associate Priest	0	0	0	22,883	17,581	0
Supply Priest	2,540	1,293	1,293	1,896	518	2,000
Parish Administrator	15,600	14,758	13,628	14,124	12,144	17,160
Music Director	23,751	23,766	30,880	31,625	31,800	32,574
Nursery Care	0	3,015	3,112	3,153	3,394	3,399
Pensions	17,527	17,169	17,598	19,596	20,908	16,857
Social Security & Medicare	9,802	10,277	11,641	12,399	12,175	12,258
Total Salary & Wages	151,332	152,410	166,971	196,598	189,442	177,898
Administration						
Office Supplies & Expenses	2,692	1,933	4,142	4,350	3,248	3,000
Telephone	2,495	2,943	3,025	2,963	2,943	2,950
Postage	723	624	837	500	738	700
Computer & Internet Fees	2,867	2,471	2,811	3,380	2,548	2,700
Leased Equipment & Copier	12,407	13,537	12,362	13,000	11,521	12,000
ADP Payroll, ASC, Audit	6,502	7,065	1,895	2,000	2,487	2,500
VANCO Expenses	688	675	758	775	809	780
Rector's Business Expense	1,021	556	568	2,100	712	2,100
Rector's Auto	370	1,146	1,176	1,500	862	1,500
Total Administration	29,765	30,949	27,576	25,868	27,576	27,874
Insurance						
Property & Liability	16,166	21,094	19,003	21,875	23,111	24,966
Rector Insurance	11,922	12,513	12,809	12,809	14,809	14,388
Administrator Insurance	4,171	2,874	3,220	3,220	3,220	0
Worker's Comp	426	341	347	840	481	840
Total Insurance	32,685	36,822	34,330	41,621	41,621	31,065
Worship & Parish Life						
Worship/Altar Supplies	1,973	3,140	1,318	2,700	1,877	2,700
Music	7,675	9,155	21,507	22,500	25,543	24,365
Parish Life & Picnic	2,453	3,547	3,995	3,000	4,750	4,000
Stewardship Programs	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vestry Retreat	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Worship & Parish Life	13,421	15,843	15,843	27,950	32,170	31,065

	Actual 2022	Actual 2023	Actual 2024	Budget 2025	Actual 2025	Budget 2026
Christian Education						
Youth Christian Education	52	0	0	0	0	0
Adult Christian Education	60	452	0	0	0	0
Rector's Professional Devel	1,960	763	583	1,500	2,010	1,500
Total Christian Education	2,072	1,214	583	1,500	2,010	1,500
Maintenance & Utilities						
Maintenance	8,779	27,733	33,778	20,000	27,619	20,000
Contract Services	19,199	18,408	21,604	18,500	22,473	20,000
LA County Assessments	2,615	2,917	5,083	3,000	4,475	4,000
Utilities	24,888	25,126	27,676	29,000	35,681	36,000
Total Maintenance & Utilities	55,481	74,183	88,141	70,500	90,247	80,000
Outreach						
Rector's Discretionary Fund	1,800	1,800	1,800	1,800	1,800	1,800
Total Outreach	1,800	1,800	1,800	1,800	1,800	1,800
Diocesan Assessment	40,212	40,907	38,217	42,643	42,591	44,379
Major Facility Repairs	2,553	90,249	0	0	0	0
TOTAL OPERATING COSTS	329,321	444,377	384,438	410,303	425,748	404,710
TOTAL INCOME	347,486	355,357	369,830	412,370	407,075	404,710

2026 budget was approved by the Vestry on December 17, 2025

2025 FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Operating Costs

The Vestry approved an operating budget for 2025 with projected expenses of \$410,303 which included a mid-year adjustment to accommodate for the estimate costs associated with Father Michael's sabbatical. Actual expenses for 2025 were \$425,748, \$15,445 above our budgeted amount. Some of the factors that negatively impacted our operating costs in 2025 were:

- As we have dealt with over the past few years, roof repairs and maintenance issues with HVAC systems continue to result in higher than budgeted maintenance costs. In 2025 they came in \$7,619 over the \$20,000 in the budget.
- Costs for Contact Services, pest control, landscaping, and janitorial services increased during the year resulting in our costs acceding the \$18,500 budget by \$3,973.
- County and City fees and taxes were \$1,750 more than projected for the year.
- Music expenses were \$3,293 over our estimate of \$22,500.
- We had an increase in our Property Insurance premium in the 4th quarter.

On the positive side we had several budget items come in below our projections, including:

- Salaries for 2025 were \$7,156 below budget, with Supply Priest, Parish Administrator, and Associate Priest expense were all below budget.
- The Rector's expenses (Business & Auto) were below budget by \$1,574.
- Administration costs, including Office Supplies and Copier expenses, were \$3,126 below budget for the year.

Income

The combination of pledge income, weekly plate offerings, and income from third-party usage of our facilities totaled \$387,075. The Vestry approved the transfer of \$20,000 from our F&M savings account to fund the one-time expenses associated with Father Michael's sabbatical. Total income (including the saving transfer) was \$407,075, which was \$5,290 below the \$412,370 we had budgeted for 2025. The following is a breakdown of the sources of our 2025 income vs our 2025 budget amounts:

	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Budget</u>
Pledge Income	\$272,666	\$274,370
Plate collections	41,926	43,500
Other (Facility Rentals)	43,483	44,850
Christmas & Easter Giving	4,181	3,000
School & Cell Tower Income	24,641	26,400
Vanco Offset Fees	177	250
Transfer from Savings	<u>20,000</u>	<u>20,000</u>
	\$407,075	\$412,370

MISSION STATEMENT BUDGET FOR 2026

2026 Mission Budget

Our estimated income for 2026 is \$404,710. This is based on actual income from 2025 and the results of our 2026 pledge campaign. The budget approved by the Vestry at its December 2025 meeting projects a balanced budget for 2026. The operating expenses are projected to be \$404,710, which is equal to our projected income.

It continues to be our goal to have adequate income on a yearly basis to fund all our operating expenses included in the operating budget. As in prior years we are including fees from third-party usage of our facilities to help achieve this goal.

The following are highlights of the 2026 Mission Budget:

- Budget assumes 3% cost of living salary increases for 2026.
- All outreach programs will continue to be funded outside of the Mission Budget.
- The Diocesan Assessment is set at 12% of our 2024 standard operating income of \$369,830. The 12% of standard operating income is the minimum requirement that the Diocese has set for all its functioning parishes.

Cash Balances

Cash balances at year end 2024 totaled \$555,941 of which \$443,748 is invested in the Diocesan Investment Trust. The balance of the cash is in our Operating Account (\$28,366) and Savings Account (\$83,827) at F & M Bank.

RECTOR'S DISCRETIONARY FUND SUMMARY FOR 2025

The Canons of the Church allow for the establishment of a fund separate from the Parish General Fund accounts, for purposes of providing financial assistance to parishioners and others who are in need. This fund, the Rector's Discretionary Fund, to which the Rector is sole signer, and which is solely under the control of the Rector, is set-up to provide for complete confidentiality of the recipients.

The Parish budget provides the Rector's Discretionary Fund with \$150 per month as a form of outreach ministry. Additional income is provided by parishioners and others who donate to the Fund periodically. Honoraria from weddings and memorial services may also be deposited in the Fund as the Rector so chooses. Following is a summary of the Fund's receipts and disbursements (by category only) for 2025.

Balance as of December 31, 2024	413.71
Receipts	
Parish Contributions	1,800.00
Contributions from Individuals	3,640.19
Honoraria	1,500.00
Other	150.00
Total Receipts	7,090.19
Disbursements	
Assistance	
General Assistance	(588.00)
Housing	(1,893.00)
Utilities	(600.00)
Other	(184.00)
Total Assistance	(3,265.00)
Charitable Organizations	(3,200.00)
Administrative Expenses	(39.00)
Total Disbursements	(6,504.00)
Excess (deficit) receipts over disbursements	586.19
Balance as of December 31, 2025	999.90

Prepared by the Rev. Michael Fincher, Rector

RITE AT THE CONCLUSION OF VESTRY SERVICE

Rector: Malcolm, John, and Lizz, you were called by the people of God, to serve them as a member of the Vestry of this parish. You answered their call. You have been faithful in attendance at meetings. You have been a responsible steward of the congregation's resources. You have considered our future course and your views have informed our planning. You have led by example, especially in attendance at worship and in sharing your time, talent, and treasure with Christ's church. Now, others must step forward to take your place among the leaders of this congregation. As you leave the Vestry, we thank you for your service, saying with Jesus, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." We offer you our prayers and our support as you move on in the service of our Lord, Jesus Christ. And we ask you to reaffirm your commitment to this parish as a fitting capstone to the duty you have so faithfully discharged.

Malcolm, John, and Lizz, do you reaffirm your commitment as a member of this congregation?

Member: I do.

Rector: Will you seek new ways to serve Christ in his church?

Member: I will, with God's help.

Rector: Will you continue to support the work of this parish with your time, talent, and treasure?

Member: I will, with God's help.

Rector: Will you refrain from meddling, and offer advice and counsel to the next Vestry only when asked?

Member: I will, with God's help.

Rector: Will you reject gossip and backbiting about your successors, and respect the integrity of their efforts?

Member: I will, with God's help.

Rector: Will you respect the confidentiality of the new Vestry's deliberations, and be content to learn about such matters when the rest of the parish does?

Member: I will, with God's help.

Rector: Will you trust the Spirit to work through our newly elected leaders to guide this parish and all its members in their life and work?

Member: I will, with God's help.

Rector: Will you continue to pray for this parish, its members, its clergy, and its Vestry?

Member: I will, with God's help.

Rector: O God, who sent your Son to show us that the last shall be first and that the one who would be greatest must be the least, help your servants Holly, Charlotte, and Carol, who have been faithful members of the Vestry of this parish, find new ways to exercise ministry and leadership in your church. Help them to keep the promises made here today before. Grant that they, free from the burdens of this office, might discover anew the joy of our Christian faith. Inspire them to be supportive of and helpful to those who take their place on the Vestry. And grant that they, along with all good and faithful stewards within your kingdom, may enter into your joy, in this life and in the life hereafter. Through Jesus Christ our Lord,

All: **Amen.**

COMMISSIONING OF VESTRY MEMBERS AND DIOCESAN CONVENTION DELEGATES

Sr. Warden: On behalf of St. Gregory's Parish, I present: Caryn Cobb, Fred Cornett, and Abby Koerkenmeier, Carol Bernstein, Beth Eldon, and Cheryl Rodi, continuing in their terms as members of the Vestry;

_____, as newly elected members of the Vestry; and

_____, as delegates to Diocesan Convention.

Rector: Have these leaders been elected by the congregation in accordance with the bylaws of our congregation?

Sr. Warden: They have.

Rector (to the new leaders):

Do you commit yourselves to carry out the responsibilities of the office to which you have been appointed?

Leaders: I do.

Rector: Do you reaffirm your commitment to follow Christ and to serve this congregation in his name?

Leaders: I do.

Rector (to the congregation):

Will you do all in your power to support these leaders with your prayers, your honest yet gracious communication with them, and your willingness to help them carry out Christ's ministry in this church?

People: **We will.**

Rector: In the name of this congregation I commission you for this work, and pledge you our prayers, encouragement, and support. May the Holy Spirit guide and strengthen you, that in this, and in all things, you may do God's will in the service

of the kingdom of Christ. **Amen.**

Let us pray.

Almighty God, look with favor upon these persons who have now reaffirmed their commitment to follow Christ and to serve in his name. Give them courage, patience, and vision; and strengthen us all in our Christian vocation of witness to the world, and of service to others; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**



ST. GREGORY'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

6201 E. WILLOW STREET, LONG BEACH, CALIFORNIA 90815
562-420-1311 WWW.STGREGORYSCHURCH.COM

WELCOME TO ST. GREGORY'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH!

St. Gregory's is a warm and caring community of families and singles, young and old, committed to sharing the good news that Jesus is the Lord of all life. We are an Episcopal Church, having members from all backgrounds and religious traditions, many of us had no church involvement before coming here. We want to offer to you the same welcome and friendship that were extended to us when we came to St. Gregory's.

ST. GREGORY'S MISSION STATEMENT

God has called us into Christian community and gifted us for ministry:

To worship and glorify God
To transform faith into action
To share the love of Jesus Christ

The Right Reverend John Harvey Taylor
Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles

The Reverend Michael K. Fincher, Rector
rector@stgregoryschurch.com

David York, Music Director & Organist
york1635@aol.com

Parish Office Hours: 9:00am-12:00pm, Tuesday – Thursday