Witness “The Beautiful Birth”

**Christmas Pageant**
ELPC’s annual Christmas Pageant will be held at 10 am, on **Sun. Dec. 14**, in the Social Hall. This year’s pageant is entitled, “The Beautiful Birth,” and was written by ELPC member Ashley Birt. The children and youth of ELPC will guide us in a retelling of Jesus’ birth from an artistic lens—helping us notice artistic elements in the biblical texts we all know and love.

Please join us as we sing the carols of the season, and hear and see the good news proclaimed that “unto us a baby was born in Bethlehem, a Savior who is Christ the Lord!”

**Note:** There will be no Church School classes this day, so that everyone can enjoy the Pageant.

**Pageant Rehearsal**
All children and youth in grades 6–8 are invited to participate in the ELPC Christmas Pageant. We will gather for rehearsal at 9:30 am, on **Sat., Dec. 13**. Please report to your Church School classrooms to put on your costumes. After rehearsal, we will have a brief Christmas party together in Rooms 224 and 227.

**Christmas Eve Worship**
Join us on **Wed., Dec. 24**, in the Sanctuary, for our Christmas Eve worship services. Both services feature the celebration of the Lord’s supper and candle lighting.

- **Friends and Family Service** at 5 pm
- **Candlelight Service** at 11 pm

Prelude music begins at 10:30 pm.

**Sunday Services**
* Celebration of the Lord’s Supper

**Journey Worship • 8:45 am**
Dec. 7* Rev. Dr. Randy Bush
Dec. 14 Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy
Dec. 21 Rev. Heather Schoenewolf
Dec. 28 No Service

**Sanctuary Worship • 11 am**
Dec. 7* Rev. Heather Schoenewolf
Dec. 14 Rev. Dr. Randy Bush
Dec. 21 Rev. Dr. Randy Bush
Dec. 28 Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy

**Labyrinth Prayer Walk**
Mondays • 7 am–1 pm
Wednesdays • 9 am–9 pm

**Taizé Prayer Service**
Wednesdays • 7 pm
Rev. Mary Lynn Callahan

**Note:** We will not have a Taizé Prayer Service or Class on **Wed., Dec. 24**.

**After Taizé Class Schedule**
Classes begin at 8:15 pm.
Dec. 3: Christmas Reflections
Dec. 10: Extended Time of Music and Prayer
Dec. 17: Live Music on the Labyrinth
Dec. 31: New Year’s Eve Celebrations!

**New Church Tour Offered**
On **Sun., Dec. 14**, ELPC member Stephen Evrard will tell us about the beautiful stained-glass windows in our Sanctuary and Chapel. The tour will begin at 12:15 pm, and last about an hour.
Pastoral Message

The Rev. Dr. Randall K. Bush, Pastor

Advent and Christmas are really two stories. Advent focuses on the promise of God to transform our troubled world into a place of lasting peace, love and justice. It involves long-range vision—scanning over the landscape of today’s world to look toward the distant-yet-visible horizon of God’s kingdom. This story reminds us that glimpses of “what is to be” can be seen in “what is” right now, and so we work and pray and trust that God is right beside us even as we await the advent of the “Day of the Lord.”

The Christmas story is different, in that it lays the groundwork for “what is to come” by sharing how God in Christ has already revealed a bit of the promised future kingdom in our midst. Since we cannot grasp the height, depth and breadth of God’s plan for all humanity, Jesus emptied himself of heavenly attributes enough to let us see God in earthly categories. Born a humble child and raised in a poor-yet-pious family, Jesus went on to teach a message of spiritual transformation that overturned old assumptions about power and opened hearts and minds to the fullness of the ways of the Lord. This led to Jesus being rejected by the people around him; but that act of violence was overturned by the wonder of the Easter resurrection. That event now serves as the linchpin of all history, for the “Christmas story” Savior who came is the “Advent story” Redeemer whose return we await with hope and confidence.

In today’s fast-paced, 24/7 media-saturated world, it is important to note that both the Advent and Christmas stories unfold quite slowly. Telling about the birth of Jesus involves watching ancient prophecies unfold and tracking wise men as they plod across the landscape following a slow moving star. The fastest movers in the whole story are the shepherds, who run into Bethlehem to see “this thing that has taken place.” But even at their fastest, these shepherds were far slower than light speed or today’s Facebook posts. And in any discussion about the Advent of God’s promised future kingdom, the time reference is one measured in millennia, not in fractions of a second. The famous phrase from 2 Peter about how “one day with the Lord is like a thousand years” tries to cool our feverish, electronic pace of life with a different and much slower understanding of time.

In his recent book, Henry Kissinger commented that while wars have occurred since the dawn of civilization, the causes of these conflicts are not limited to an “absence of information or an insufficient ability to share it.” In fact, the immediacy of information in today’s world means that every incident that happens takes on global importance. Everything becomes part of “our” story right now, whether it is a flood, a virus outbreak, or a political scandal. Kissinger argues that this makes boldness and leadership more difficult than ever.

The beauty of the Advent and Christmas stories is that they are both grounded in time yet timeless. Whatever is trending on social media or dominating today’s headlines should not distract us from the slower-paced, eternity-drenched saga of our faith. God as revealed in Christ Jesus knows both today’s news and a thousand years’ history. And rejoice, for we are part of that great story as it unfolds at its own perfect pace!
Annual Christmas Sale
Our efforts will culminate with the dedication of the toys during our Sanctuary Worship at 11 am, on Sun., Dec. 7, followed by our annual Christmas Sale in the McKelvey Room, where you determine the price you pay. Holiday-related items made of wood and stained glass will be available. Proceeds will keep the Toymakers in wood and paint for the year ahead.

Charis, ELPC’s Alternative Gift Giving Guide
As Christians, during the Christmas season, we remember the gift we have received—the birth of Jesus. Christmas is the perfect time to reflect on God’s charis—God’s favor, grace and kindness towards us.

With the commercialization of the holiday season, we are sometimes drawn into the hustle and bustle, expense, and abundance of gift giving. The ELPC Mission Board invites you to prayerfully consider giving gifts that express and extend charis by gifting from the suggestions in Charis—An Alternative Gift Giving Guide. Giving a gift from this guide ensures your gift will bless the receiver, and extend charis to the artisan, organization or mission from which the gift was purchased.

Guides are available at the Information Desk and during our Sunday fellowship hour. Call the Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy at 412.441.3800 x30 for more details.

The Giving Tree
There’s still time to support children and families in our faith family and community through our annual Christmas Giving Tree.

The Giving Tree will be set up by the Information Desk. Stop by and select a tag from 9:30 am–12:30 pm, on Sun., Nov. 30 and Dec. 7, and at the Taizé service on Wed., Dec. 3. If you’d like to make a monetary donation, please make your check payable to “ELPC Giving Tree.”

Wrapped gifts—with tags—and checks are due in the church office no later than noon on Sun., Dec. 14.

Nearly 100 children were provided gifts through the Giving Tree in 2013. This year, we hope to reach more than 100. The Deacon Board thanks the congregation for its enthusiastic support of this ministry.

Feeling Crafty?
Our Knitting, Sewing, and Toy Makers Groups are looking for new members to share in fellowship and use their talents to meet the needs of our local and global communities. Beginners are welcome. For more information, call Diane Jackson at 412.441.6021.

• Knitting Group: Join us on Tues., Dec. 2, from 1–3 pm, in Room 244. We will continue our afghan projects and knitted bears for Jeremiah’s Place. We also will look at patterns for hats for the East End Community Health Center. Yarn donations are always appreciated.

• Sewing Group: Join us on Mon., Dec. 15, from 4:30–6:30 pm, in the Sewing Room. We will finish our eye-glass cases for the January mission to Haiti, and work on blankets, hats, and mittens. Fleece material donations are appreciated.

Shop for Gifts, Help Others
The ELPC Deacons invite you to a night of holiday shopping at Ten Thousand Villages (5824 Forbes Ave.), from 6–8 pm, on Thurs., Dec. 4. A percentage of your purchase will be donated to the ELPC Thanksgiving Food Ministry. Your holiday gifts will give three times: to the recipient, the artisan, and a needy family in our midst!

We Work, so the Children can Play
The Toymakers Group works all year to produce hand-made and hand-painted toys for children. While the bulk of our toys are distributed in Pittsburgh at shelters for women and children, ELPC members also have taken them on Mission Trips to places such as Mexico, Haiti, Uganda, Kenya, and Malawi. We are fueled by the smiles we see on children at play all over the world.

We will meet on Wed., Dec. 3 and 17, in the Sewing Room, from 9 am–12 pm. We welcome any able body, regardless of skill level. There’s always sanding and painting to do. If you own a scroll or band saw, there’s plenty of homework, too.

The group is led by Diane Jackson and Mike Anderson. If you are interested in joining this small—but by no means exclusive—ministry, contact Mike at 412.361.4419 or mrmander@comcast.net.

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Guides are available at the Information Desk and during our Sunday fellowship hour. Call the Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy at 412.441.3800 x30 for more details.
Note: We will not have Church School classes on Dec. 14, so that we can enjoy our annual Christmas Pageant together. See details on page 1. We also will not have classes on Dec. 28 or Jan. 4.

Contemporaries Class Second Floor Parlor Facilitator: Mary Alice Lightle
Dec. 7: Extending God’s Welcome Led by Mary Alice Lightle
From the earliest times, Christians have received the stranger as though they were receiving Jesus Himself! This gospel hospitality is awkward and risky, but it also can be transformative.

Dec. 21: Waiting to Exhale Led by Rev. Mary Lynn Callahan
John Burgess describes prayer as being “above all...a discipline of waiting on God.” What does that mean when the “train” is late or never arrives? What do we do in the meantime? Does our prayer mean anything, or is it just something to do while we hold our breath and wait for God to act? Let’s talk about prayer—an intimately familiar, yet strikingly unfamiliar act of discipleship.

Soul Food Room 244 Facilitator: Joe Hajdu
Dec. 7 and 21: Advent and Christmas Themes
We will be discussing Advent and Christmas themes using the writings of Thomas Merton.

Journey with Scripture Second Floor Library Facilitator: Jan Lyle Irvin
“Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other.” This verse from Psalm 89 implies that current life is one of separation. Yet, in the midst of such alienation, the psalmist proclaims a future time of restoration and wholeness. December may be winding down a calendar year of sorrows, but it also is Advent, the coming of God in Christ, a new church year, and new cycle of scripture readings. May justice, peace, faithfulness, and steadfast love be yours, all together. Come join us for these readings:

Dec. 7:
- Isaiah 40:1–11; Psalms 85:1–2, 8–13;
- 2 Peter 3:8–15a; Mark 1:1–8

Dec. 21:
- 2 Samuel 7:1–11,16; Psalms 89:1–4, 19–26;
- Romans 16:25–27; Luke 1:26–38

Seekers Room 234 Facilitator: Gwen Puza
Dec. 7: Admiration of “Our Mother Mary” in the Koran
In the Koran, Mary is revered as the mother of Jesus. Two entire chapters of the Koran are dedicated to Mary, describing her life and the difficulties she had to endure for the pleasure of God, under conditions where women were unappreciated and belittled.

Sebnum Unlu will present an analysis of the beautiful and noble character of “Our Mother Mary” as described in the Holy Qur’an and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad.

Dec. 21: Combined class with Contemporaries

Advent Devotionals are Available on the Second Floor CE Table

Guess Who’s Coming for Christmas is an Advent devotional booklet and chain activity for children and their families. Each day, kids are introduced to characters from the Old and New Testaments that help tell the story of Jesus’ birth. Then, children can add a corresponding link in the Advent chain to count the days to Christmas.

Joy in Jesus is a devotional booklet that invites teens and adults to reflect on the joy we have in Jesus because of the special gift of His birth. Our lives can be demanding and difficult. This booklet offers scripture, reflection, and prayer to encourage us to center on the joy that is ours in Christ.

A Quiet Chamber Kept for Thee is a booklet of prayers for each day of Advent, written to take less than two minutes of your time. This devotion offers you a few moments of quiet each day that you might spend with Christ, and reflect on the peace, comfort and wonder we anticipate at His birth.
Youth Ministry

Sara Hackett, Coordinator for Christian Education and Youth Ministry

Sat., Dec. 6, 12, and 20: Youth Basketball from 5–8 pm
Students in grades 9–12 are invited to play basketball in the ELPC Gym.

Sat., Dec. 13: Junior-High Service Project from 11:30 am–2:30 pm
Youth in grades 6–8 are invited to go shopping and choose gifts for children in foster care. We will eat lunch after our Christmas Pageant rehearsal and then walk to Target. A permission slip is required. RSVP to Sara Hackett at 412.673.2926 or SaraH@coh.net.

Sun., Dec. 21: Spreading Holiday Cheer
Senior-high youth will go Christmas caroling and play bingo with the residents at Shadyside Nursing Home. We will meet following worship at about 12 pm, and return by 4:15 pm. Lunch will be provided.

Young Adult Ministry

Wil Forrest, Coordinator of Young Adult and Outreach Programs

Fri., Dec. 5: First Friday @ Holiday Lights at 7 pm, meet at ELPC
Come see the lights! First, we will drive together to see the holiday lights and then share in some fellowship time at a local eatery. Please let Wil know if you are coming so he can save you a seat.

Sun., Dec. 7: YAM Sunday Class at 9:45 am, in the Pastor’s Conference Room
How do I reconcile that God is love and at the same time God has taken so many lives in the Bible? The fall theme of Scriptures that challenge us as Christians concludes as Pastor Randy leads this class focusing on violence and God in the Bible. Café Justo coffee served and childcare available in the nursery.

Sat., Dec. 13: Potluck Dinner and RCC Holiday Concert
Celebrate the season with a potluck dinner in the Parlor at 5 pm, and then attend the Renaissance City Choir’s Holiday Concert in the Sanctuary at 7:30 pm. See Wil about tickets and what you plan to bring for the potluck by Fri., Dec. 5.

LGBTQ Ministry

Wil Forrest, Coordinator of Young Adult and Outreach Programs

To learn more about, or to get involved with, ELPC’s LGBTQ Ministry, contact Wil Forrest at Wil@coh.net or 412.441.3800 x14.

Our next spiritual gathering on Sat., Dec. 6. All are welcome to join us as we celebrate the season!

God created you. God loves you. Be yourself.
Reconciling Paul: A Contemporary Study of 2 Corinthians
Tues., Dec. 2 at 10 am | Mon., Dec. 8 at 7 pm
Join us as we continue our study of 2 Corinthians. Our lesson, Carrying in Our Bodies Jesus’ Acts of Healing, Reconciliation, and Love is based on 2 Corinthians 4:7–5:10. A potluck lunch follows the Tuesday morning study. All are welcome!

Spiritual Life
The Rev. Mary Lynn Callahan, Director of Spiritual Life Ministries
Fri.–Sun., Dec. 5–7: Fast for Hunger
In a season in which we indulge and over-indulge ourselves, let us take a period of time to fast and pray in solidarity with those for whom this season only highlights their lack of adequate food. We begin our December Fast for Hunger the evening of Fri., Dec. 5, and conclude with the Celebration of the Lord's Supper on Sun., Dec. 7. Materials are available on the SLC Bulletin Board.

Sat., Dec. 6: Advent Day of Healing from 9 am–4 pm, in the ELPC Parlor
Doesn't that sound more like a holy season than just supporting the consumer economy and celebrating the superficial “joy” of “Sparkle Season?” This year, let's make Advent about something more! The SLC invites you to a special Day of Advent Wholeness and Healing: Madonnas, Meditation, and Mandalas. Join us as we delve into the richness and depth of this season. Lunch is provided. RSVP to the Rev. Mary Lynn Callahan by Wed., Dec. 3.

Celebrate a Contemplative New Year’s Eve on Wed., Dec. 31
• World Healing Day from 6:55–8 am, in the Social Hall
Since 1986, millions of people continue to gather in prayer on this day, at the same moment in time for a planetary affirmation of peace, love and forgiveness. Join us in body or spirit for a walk on the Labyrinth and meditation. Add your love and light to this moment of oneness. For more details, call 412.571.1223.

• A New Year’s Eve Reflection from 8:15 am–12 pm, in the Second Floor Parlor
Join us for a prayerful, directed Examen of the past year. The Examen is an ancient form of prayer aimed at helping us to discern the movement of God in our lives. Join the Rev. Mary Lynn Callahan in a time of quietness, imagery, exploration, and prayer as we apply this pattern of reflection to the past year as a way to find God in the rhythm of our days. A light breakfast will be served.

• A New Year’s Eve Celebration of Prayer and Song from 7–8 pm, in the Chapel
Join us at our Taizé Worship service for a time of worship and prayer, singing and silence, candles and icons, as we end 2014 and welcome 2015, designated by the Taizé community to be a year of moving Towards a New Solidarity.

Planned Giving
On this year’s Stewardship Pledge Card, many people noted they plan to remember ELPC in their will and estates. These unrestricted bequests to our church are a critical part of our long-term financial health. Our endowment resources are the primary means for maintaining our beautiful cathedral and supporting our core program areas and pastoral staff.

For details on remembering ELPC in your estate planning, talk to Pam Kimmel or Lenore Williams (Finance Committee chair).

The Enneagram
Join Fr. Bernie Tickerhoof in a study of this ancient tool for self awareness and healing. Mark your calendars and check the ELPC website and SLC bulletin board for details.

• Feb. 20–22: Enneagram Retreat
• Feb. 26–April 16: Thursday Evening Enneagram Discussion
• April 17–19: Advanced Enneagram Retreat

Stewardship Campaign
The fall Stewardship Campaign culminated on Stewardship Sunday, Nov. 9. Congregation members brought forth their pledges for 2015, as well as non-perishable food donations for community Thanksgiving baskets.

If you have not turned in a pledge card, there is still time to do so. The Stewardship Committee is hopeful that we will reach our goals of new pledges, new monthly EFT support, and continued expressions of faithful generosity to our church's program and mission ministries.

Reminder: Any year-end donations and pledges to ELPC need to be received in the church office by Mon., Dec. 29.
Health Ministry
The Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy, Staff Representative

Pitt Retiree Study Offered in East End and Other Pittsburgh locations
Dr. Elizabeth M. Venditti and her research team from the University of Pittsburgh are offering ELPC members an opportunity to screen for enrollment in the Pitt Retiree Study. Those who are eligible and interested may join Group Lifestyle Balance—a free, 12-week weight management program to reduce risk factors for Type 2 diabetes and heart disease by making modest and reasonable changes in eating habits, physical activity, and weight.

Over 180 retirees (from other groups) have enrolled since 2012 and they report feeling better and more energetic. On average, they have lost 6.5% of their baseline weight and many individuals have developed moderately active lifestyle habits (150 minutes per week of walking or similar activities).

We are pleased to be able to offer you this program, which has been shown to help older adults take greater control of their health and well-being. The weekly sessions are offered at convenient locations throughout Pittsburgh, including the East End. Participants can expect to attend health assessments at 0, 4, 12 and 24 months as part of the follow-up study.

Group Lifestyle Balance will be offered during spring and summer; screening begins in late 2014. Call 412.647.1845 to learn more.

Eligibility Requirements
• Not already diagnosed as having diabetes;
• Aged 65–80 at time of enrollment;
• Overweight or obese, and want to lose about 7% your bodyweight and become more active, mostly by walking; and
• Have one other health risk factor for diabetes, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or family history of diabetes.

How Do You Use Your Gifts to Serve God?
by Wil Forrest, Coordinator of Young Adult and Outreach Programs
God gives each of us certain skills and abilities. These are natural strengths and talents. They are gifts given by God—given to be used. In return, your gift to God is to use them. How do you use your gifts to serve God?

How Do You Use Your Gifts to Serve God? (continued)

Contact Wil Forrest at Wil@coh.net or 412.441.3800 x14 to find out how you can use your gifts to serve at ELPC and in our community. To read about other service opportunities, please visit CathedralOfHope.org/programs/iSERVE.

Session News
During November, the session:
• Welcomed a wonderful group of 12 new members and 5 friends, and approved one adult baptism and two infant baptisms;
• Noted that the 2015 budget is awaiting the results of the fall Stewardship Campaign before being considered for approval by Session in early December; and
• Heard a full report from the Renovations Committee about the design priorities, scope, and budget projections for capital improvements on our church. More information will be available in next month’s newsletter.

ELPC People
If you have news to share, please call Gloria Knopp at 412.441.3800 x22.

Good News
• Join us in welcoming our new members, who joined on Nov. 2:
  Michael Ball; Frank and Paula Bauerle; Garrett Breisinger; Brent Clark; Carla Coles; Paul and Rebecca Fast; Rachel Jacobson; Elizabeth McDonald; Raegan Neff; Kevin and Ginny Seybold; Heidi Sholtes; Jamar Thrasher; and Alise Wright.

• Congratulations to Rebecca Shetler Fast, who was recently baptized.

Prayers
We offer our prayers and condolences to the family and friends of those who recently passed away:
• Lynne Chadwick’s father-in-law.
...inviting all to join our diverse, inclusive family of faith, transcending boundaries of race, class, ability, culture, age, gender and sexual identity to become one in Christ.”

Winter Rally Day: Simple Gifts

The holidays, are for many, a time of giving and receiving gifts. On Sun., Jan. 11, as we celebrate our return to Church School after the Christmas break, we do so reflecting on the gifts that we are called to bring as an offering to Jesus—the God-given gifts we know are an extension of God’s promises to us in our baptism.

Join us for an inter-generational Church School celebration in the Social Hall together. The elements from our Winter Rally Day celebration will carry over into our Sanctuary Worship service at 11 am.

Note: There is no Church School on Sun., Dec. 28 or Jan. 4.

Christmas Joy Offering

“Send out your light and your truth; and let them lead me.”—Psalm 43:3

As a cherished Presbyterian tradition—dating to the 1930s—the Christmas Joy Offering is distributed 50/50 between the Assistance Program of the Board of Pensions and Presbyterian-related universities and colleges. This important offering provides financial support to church workers and their families, not only supporting the development of educational and spiritual leadership, but also nurturing racial and ethnic heritage.

ELPC will receive the Christmas Joy Offering on Sun., Dec. 14. Please give generously. The ELPC Mission Board thanks you in advance.

Christmas with The Brass Roots and Organ

The Cathedral Concerts’ season will continue at 8 pm, on Fri., Dec. 19, in the ELPC Sanctuary. Our resident brass ensemble, The Brass Roots, will be joined by Dr. Ed Moore at the organ for a festive concert of music for the season! The concert is free, but a free-will offering will be accepted.