Come See The Christmas Puzzle
Sun., Dec. 15, at 10 am, in the Social Hall

Once again, the children of our church will lead us in a staged retelling of the most beloved story of our faith—the birth of baby Jesus. Children will guide us to the manger as they set the stage for us: as shepherds and sheep, donkeys and camels, wise people and angels, Elizabeth and Zechariah—and, of course, Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus. This familiar story will be retold with a unique flare through the narrative voices of the Junior High Church School class, and with an original script prepared for us by ELPC’s Ashley Birt, who is completing her senior year at Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

We will not have Church School classes on this day, so that we all can enjoy the Christmas Pageant together.

Rehearsal: All children who are participating in the Pageant (from infancy through grade 8) are asked to attend rehearsal from 9:30–11 am, on Sat., Dec. 14. Students are to report to their classrooms. Christian Education will host a small Christmas Party on the Second Floor following rehearsal.

Jazz “Lessons and Carols” Service

On Sun., Dec. 15, ELPC is pleased to welcome back Mike Tomaro for a special jazz “Lessons and Carols” service at 11 am. Mike has been the Director of Jazz Studies at Duquesne University since 1997 and is a gifted saxophonist, flutist, composer, recording artist and educator.

The service will feature a blending of familiar Christmas readings, carols, and special music selections performed by Mr. Tomaro and our ELPC Adult Choir. Join us for this Sunday journey from Advent to Christmas accompanied by upbeat, jazz melodies!

Sunday Services
* Celebration of the Lord’s Supper

Good Samaritan Worship • 8 am
Held at the EECM Community House
Liturgists: Mark and Barbara DeWitt
Dec. 1* Rev. Cynthia Jackson,
Pittsburgh Presbytery
Dec. 8 Bible Study
Dec. 15 Wil Forrest
Dec. 22 Rev. Saleem Ghubril,
Mosaic Community Church
Dec. 29 Bible Study

Journey Worship • 8:45 am
Dec. 1* Eric Vinsel, seminary intern
Dec. 8 Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy
Dec. 15 Rev. Dr. Randy Bush
Dec. 22 Rev. Heather Schoenewolf
Dec. 29 No service

Sanctuary Worship • 11 am
Dec. 1* Rev. Dr. Randy Bush
Dec. 8 Rev. Heather Schoenewolf
Dec. 15 Rev. Dr. Randy Bush
Dec. 22 Rev. Dr. Randy Bush
Dec. 29 Rev. Mary Lynn Callahan

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

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

Note: There will be no Taizé service or class on Wed., Dec. 25 or Jan. 1.

Christmas Eve Worship
Join us on Tues., Dec. 24, for our Christmas Eve worship services. Both services will 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.
Pastoral Message

The Rev. Dr. Randall K. Bush, Pastor

Some fiction writers have been complaining about a specific type of new technology that is making their job harder. Specifically, they are upset about cellphones. As one person put it, “there’s nothing worse for plots than cellphones. Once your characters have one, there’s no reason for them to get lost or stranded. Or miss each other at the top of the Empire State Building.” (That last remark is a reference to two movies, An Affair to Remember and Sleepless in Seattle.)

In many great stories, an important part of the plot involves having the main characters get lost and eventually find their way home. Think of Ulysses, Pilgrim’s Progress, or Lord of the Rings. The power of the story comes through identifying with someone who is in the dark, struggling to “get home,” hoping to find a way forward to greater understanding.

Now consider the main events in the Christmas story. Journeys to new places play an important role in this biblical drama; and for many of the characters, these journeys involve moving from familiar places to uncharted, new territory. The magi traveled from their home in the Orient to find the Christ Child, whose birth was heralded by a star. Joseph and Mary had to journey from their home in Nazareth to a distant, ancestral village of Bethlehem, because of the government census. And even the shepherds, whom angels sent from their fields late at night, were sent on a quest to search the back streets of Bethlehem to find this Savior born in a lowly manger.

It is safe to assume that cellphones were not available on that first Christmas Day. Nor was GPS an option for people seeking to find the Savior born in Bethlehem. All the actors in the Christmas story explicitly needed to trust in God to find their way forward to a new place—a place where angels tell “news of great joy” to lowly shepherds far from the halls of power; a place where immigrants and outsiders follow a star to kneel before the one whose birth embodies a message of “peace on earth, goodwill for all people;” a place where a young mother and nervous father will hold a child who is destined to “bring down the powerful from their thrones and lift up the lowly.”

That same capacity to trust in God remains available to us, as we celebrate Advent and Christmas this year. Even with our cellphones and GPS devices, our best hope for finding our way “home” whenever we become lost is through a reliance on the grace and mercy of the eternal Lord—who knows our needs before we ask and seeks out all God’s lost lambs. The Internet and Wi-Fi resources may help us with many details of our lives today. But as noted education professor Howard Gardner has written, modern technology may provide answers to all the questions “except the important ones.”

Cellphones and other devices may help you avoid getting lost. But that is different from being “found.” Wherever you are on your journey, quiet your anxious spirit to allow Christ, who seeks you and wishes to restore you, celebrate the good news of salvation with you, and lead you forward by faith.

Randy Bush
We are a Wonderfully Odd Bunch!
by Eric Vinsel

I am just four months into my internship here at ELPC, and let me just say this church is composed of a wonderfully odd bunch of people! In my entire life, I have never seen or been a part of a more diverse group.

The question I always ask when I walk through the doors of a church for the first time is “Who is NOT here?” Once that question is in your head, it will plague you as you realize just how mono-cultural so many American churches truly are. One church has no one with special needs; another has no young families; this one has no African-American families, while that one has no white families; another has no one who is hearing impaired, while another has no one from the LGBTQ community. That one only has the poor, while another only has the rich. But when I look around ELPC, I cannot think of a single group that is not present.

I have always hoped to see a church that lived into this “kingdom of God reality” where everyone, and I mean EVERY ONE, would be on one knee worshiping God. I’m not saying ELPC is perfect, but I am saying that we are a wonderfully odd bunch giving this kingdom-living thing a serious try; and I’m honored to be a part of it. Thank you for welcoming my wife and me into your church as we continue to get settled in.

There’s Still Time to Pick up a Tag

Every year, the Deacons organize the Christmas Giving Tree to benefit children and families from East End Cooperative Ministry (EECM), our ELPC Family Enrichment Ministry, and our Christian Education Ministry.

The Giving Tree will be set up near the Information Desk from 9:30 am–12:30 pm, on Sun., Dec. 1 and 8, and at the Taizé service on Wed., Dec. 4. Deacons will be on hand to help. If you would like to make a monetary donation, make your check payable to “ELPC Giving Tree.”

Wrapped gifts, with tags securely attached, and checks are due back in the church office no later than noon on Sun., Dec. 15.

Hanging of the Greens

The Worship, Music and the Arts Committee invites you to join us as we decorate ELPC for the Christmas season. There is a lot to do, so all are welcome to meet in the Sanctuary at 6:30 pm, on Tues., Dec. 3. Hot chocolate will be provided.

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 whom 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.

Stewardship Campaign Update

Thanks to a strong response on Stewardship Sunday, Nov. 3, we are making good progress toward reaching our stewardship goals for 2014. If you have not yet turned in a pledge card, please do so or contact Kate Carlson at KateC@coh.net or 412.441.3800 x16 for more information. This will save us follow-up letters and phone calls!

Also, remember that your year-end donations and pledges to ELPC need to be received by Sun., Dec. 29.
Notes: Classes begin at 9:45 am. We will not hold classes on Sun., Dec. 15, or Jan. 5. Classes will resume on Sun., Jan. 12, with an Intergenerational Winter Rally Day Church School class in the Social Hall.

Contemporaries Class Second Floor Parlor
Facilitators: Joe Kennedy and Mary Alice Lightle
Dec. 1 and 8: Immigration...Insights of Reasoning
Led by Jon and Jackie Walker
Many are familiar with the debate surrounding immigration and undocumented workers. How did we get to this point? How does our current immigration policy foster injustice for so many and profits for a few? How do we respond to the continued death toll of those who cross the border? As people of faith, and as members of the world community, what can we do to address these difficult questions?

Dec. 22: Connectivity
Led by Joe Kennedy
Technology cannot substitute meeting together in person to receive spiritual nourishment within the body of Christ. Jesus modeled the power of coming together to benefit from worship, healing, preaching, teaching, and a host of other attributes. When we assemble together in the presence of God and the Holy Spirit, this act becomes a sacred example of connectivity. Our commitment to showing up in person represents an opportunity to give God glory, honor and praise for the establishment of fellowship through engagement, thus cultivating the bonds of continual growth to enhance our development as Christians.

Journey with Scripture Second Floor Library
Facilitator: Jan Lyle Irvin
December begins a three-year cycle of Lectionary readings. In one of the first readings, the Psalmist exalts, “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord!” This is inscribed above the Highland Ave. doors. Scripture beckons us to enter the Lord’s house, to become immersed in trinitarian life through Christ. The journeys and homecomings of life become shared. Scripture, through the Spirit, leads to life and gladness. Enter in! Join us as we reflect on these readings:

Dec. 1: Isaiah 2:1–5; Psalm 122; Romans 13:11–14; Matthew 24:36–44
Dec. 8: Isaiah11:1–10; Psalm 72:1–7, 18–19; Romans 15:4–13; Matthew 3:1–12
Dec. 22: Isaiah 7:10–16; Psalm 80:1–7, 17–19; Romans 1:1–7; Matthew 1:18–25

Parenting Circle Harambe Room
Facilitator: Pam Walaski
The first Sunday of each month will be used for an open Joys and Concerns discussion. For the remaining weeks, we will discover God’s plan for our families and to share our joys and struggles with others through a facilitated discussion on a portion of the current week’s Lectionary.

No advance preparation or reading is necessary and copies of the texts being discussed will be available. If you have questions, email Pam Walaski at pam@jcsafety.com.

Seekers Room 234
Facilitator: Gwen Puza
Dec. 1: Insights into the Bible story of Sodom and Gomorrah
Led by Eric Vinsel, seminary intern
Ever wonder why Lot would give his daughters over to be abused, and then be rewarded by God for it? We will break down the story of Sodom and Gomorrah by discussing Near Eastern culture, archeological evidence, Jewish midrashic legend, and other texts from scriptures to reframe the story away from sexual immorality and toward the city’s lack of hospitality. As it turns out, little in the story is as it seems.

Dec. 8: Experiences at Taizé, France, and Ghost Ranch
ELPC members and friends will share their recent travel experiences. Florence Johnson and Susan Wadsworth-Booth will describe the Taizé practices and people they encountered in Taizé, France. Carla Depperman will discuss her visit to Ghost Ranch, the Presbyterian seminar and conference center in Abiqui, New Mexico.

Dec. + 22: Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Christmas Reflections
Led by Rev. Dr. Randy Bush
Reformed theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, actively opposed Nazism while serving as pastor to many people throughout Germany. His poems, letters and reflections on the meaning of Christ’s birth at Christmastime continue to encourage people of faith almost 70 years later.

Soul Food Pastor’s Conference Room
Facilitator: Joe Hajdu
This month, we will discuss A Testament of Devotion, a spiritual classic by Thomas Kelly.

Dec. 1: A discussion of part three of chapter one
Dec. 8: A discussion of the introduction and part one of chapter two
Dec. 22: A discussion of parts two and three of chapter two
Young Adult Ministry
Wil Forrest, Coordinator for Young Adult Ministry

Fri., Dec. 6: First Friday at the Shadyside Salon from 7 pm
Every Christmas, there are a few things you can count on: candles in worship, long lines at every store, and seeing parts of It’s a Wonderful Life about six times. We think this film is a happy, golden-age-of-cinema classic, but there’s a darker side related to dreams deferred, immense responsibility to one’s community, and hopes lost and re-found that make it a poignant tale for young adults. Join us at Shadyside Presbyterian Church as we watch this classic with a new set of eyes for what it can teach us about the young adult condition. We’re also going to have dinner, so come hungry!

Sun., Dec. 8: Sunday Book Discussion from 9:45–10:45 am
Join us in Room 244 as we wrap up our fall book discussion of Doris Janzen Longacre’s Living More With Less. We will explore our questions and practical applications of the book in our lives. And, of course, Café Justo will be served!

Tues., Dec. 10: Bowling with the Neighbors from 7–9 pm
Seeking to welcome our new neighbors to East Liberty, we will host folks from the Walnut Capital Apartments across the street for an evening of fellowship and bowling at ELPC. Come out and have a relaxing evening!

Sun., Dec. 14: Dinner and a Show starting at 5 pm
Come on out for a fun evening on the town! We will begin with dinner in the Second Floor Lounge, and then head down to the Sanctuary for the Renaissance City Choir’s holiday concert. RSVP to Wil by Sun., Dec. 1, so enough food and tickets will be available. This will be a fun way to celebrate the season!

Confirmation Class
On Sun., Dec. 8, we will gather in the Ground Floor Game Room from 12:30–3:30 pm, to discuss how participating in Worship and exploring scripture helps us follow Jesus. Lunch will be provided.

Club One Sixteen
Parents and friends are invited to join us at 5:30 pm, on Wed., Dec. 11, for a Christmas Drama, put on by our youth. Dinner will be served to the cast, crew and audience following the performance.

Note: We will not meet on Wed., Dec. 18 or 25. We will resume on Jan. 8.

Health Ministry
The Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy, Staff Representative

Tai Chi
Tuesdays through Dec. 17, from 10–11 am and 6–7 pm
The cost is $3/session. Pre-register with Kate Carlson at KateC@coh.net or 412.441.3800 x16.

Yoga
Thursdays, from 7:15–8:45 pm
A donation to the instructor is appreciated.

JourneyDance
Fri., Dec. 13, from 7–8 pm
A donation from the heart is appreciated.
Session News
The November Session meeting included a consideration of the proposed 2014 church budget. It anticipates an overall increase of $77,000, largely made possible through the strength of our endowment reserves and increased congregational giving. Annual “excess” dependence on our endowment will be reduced by $44,000 and slight increases were provided for Christian Education and Youth and Young Adult ministries, due to expanded program offerings.

Also, the Nominating Committee reported on their work in finding candidates willing to serve as Deacons, Elders, and Centennial Fund trustees, beginning in May 2014.

World Healing Day
Tues., Dec. 31, from 6:45–8 am
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, sponsored by the Spiritual Life Committee. Add your love and light to this moment of oneness. For more information, call 412.571.1223.

Spiritual Life
The Rev. Mary Lynn Callahan, Director of Spiritual Life Ministries
Sun., Dec. 1: First Sunday Advent Spirituality following 11 am worship
What does it mean to “wait for the Lord?” How do we recover the richness of the season of Advent from the superficiality of “Sparkle Season?” Join us in Room 234 as we discuss the spiritual dimensions of this time and explore the disciplines and attitudes which can help us prepare for the birth of the Christ Child in our hearts anew. A simple lunch will be served.

Year-End Reflection Retreat
Tues., Dec. 31, from 8 am–12 pm
Gather in the Second Floor Parlor following the World Healing Day mediation and Labyrinth walk to engage in a time of guided meditation, silence, creative expression and prayer as we perform an examen of our lives over the past year.

The Rev. Mary Lynn Callahan will lead us and a light breakfast will be served.

ELPC’s Fast for Hunger!
As we continue to give thanks for the bounty of life-giving food in our lives, let us also become more aware of the hunger crisis in our world. The Spiritual Life and Poverty Committees encourage you to observe our monthly Fast for Hunger, beginning the evening of Fri., Nov. 29, and concluding with the celebration of the Lord’s Supper on Sun., Dec. 1. Resources for prayer and reflection are available on the SLC Bulletin Board.

Also on Sun., Dec. 1, participants are invited to the Prayer and Meditation Room at any time between 8 and 11 am, to ground the fast in shared silence. The Poverty Committee will collect donations for the Food Pantry to allow our prayer and fast to be manifested in the practice of compassion.

As we push away from the Thanksgiving table, let us enter the season of Advent in prayer and fasting, so that the “hungry be filled with good things.” (Luke 2:53)
Serving You, So You May Serve

by Wil Forrest, iSERVE Coordinator

Here at ELPC, we have many diverse opportunities to give and to serve in the name of our Lord. It’s important that we engage in service that fulfills our needs for involvement and in areas for which we are impassioned, excited and committed, while using our spiritual gifts. There are so many opportunities within our walls and also within our community. How do you choose?

We are partners in this discernment process! I am here to help you find the opportunities that best fit your abilities and schedule. I also seek to provide what you need to be successful in this venture and to let you know how much you are appreciated and valued for all that you do. It’s my joy and privilege to serve you and to serve along side of you! Let’s connect soon and see how I might help you find your place to serve at ELPC and in our community.

Visit www.CathedralOfHope.org/about/iSERVE.html to print an iSERVE Time and Talent Interest Inventory and read about becoming a member of the weSERVE list!

LGBTQ Ministry Now Forming at ELPC

Calling all LGBTQ folks who want to be part of our new LGBTQ Ministry at ELPC. We are seeking to define needs, interests and opportunities. Contact Wil Forrest at Wil@coh.net or 412.441.3800 x14 for more information.

Upcoming Mission Trip Opportunities

In response to our call to serve God’s people near and far, the ELPC Mission Board is coordinating two mission trip opportunities in 2014. For more information, email Michele Bossers at michele2285@gmail.com.

Feb. 16–21: Rebuilding Point Pleasant
The first trip will continue our service to those effected by Hurricane Sandy. While the storm occurred over a year ago, thousands of people are still displaced. This will be our third trip to Point Pleasant, N.J., where we will help rebuild homes with Lend a Hand Ministry, Point Pleasant Presbyterian Church, and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. Tasks will include debris removal, sweeping, painting, using power tools, and more. Tools, lodging and most meals will be provided; no special skills are needed! The cost is $100 per person; limited scholarship assistance is available through the Mission Board.

Nov. 7–16: Assisting Frontera de Cristo
The second trip is an international experience to broaden our relationship with Frontero de Cristo (FDC) and Café Justo. FDC is a PC(USA) border mission located on the Douglas, Arizona/Aqua Prieta, Sonora, Mexico border. This trip will focus on the coffee cooperative in Chiapas, near the southern border of Mexico. More details will be available soon.

ELPC People

Reaching Out Together

ELPC has a long-standing tradition of supporting EECM programs that provide food for the hungry; shelter for the homeless; mentoring for those in need of support; and safe, nurturing environments in which children and families can grow and prosper.

With the opening of the new EECM Community House, we are called upon to continue our tradition of community service by joining Volunteer Service Teams to help our neighbors. Opportunities include preparing and serving meals for shelter residents, helping at the food pantry, greeting guests, planting trees and tending gardens, and distributing meals to area seniors through Meals on Wheels.

To join one or more of the ELPC Volunteer Service Teams, call the Rev. Patrice Fowler-Seary at 412.441.3800 x30 or Susan Spangler at 240.285.6507. Thank you in advance for your ready hands and willing hearts. We look forward to serving with you.

Good News

Congratulations to the infants who were baptized on Nov. 24:

• Isla Elise Ervin, daughter of Grant and Amy Ervin.
• Henry David Karns, son of Jason and Julia Karns.

Prayers

We offer our prayers and condolences to the family and friends of those who recently passed away:

• Catherine (Cassie) Lyon passed away on Oct. 23.
• Elizabeth (Betty) Dickey passed away on Nov. 3.
Advent Devotionals are Available

As a gift to you this Advent season, the Christian Education Committee is providing a selection of Advent devotionals, which you may use to deepen your relationship with the Incarnate One, as we journey closer to Christmas. These devotionals are appropriate for a range of ages, and may be used by individuals or families.

A World Awaits contains daily reflections taken from the works of popular author and theologian, C.S. Lewis, and is suitable for older teens and adults.

Waiting for Jesus in a Hurry-Up World is appropriate for persons of all ages, and is ideal for shared reflection among families or friends (though it may be used by individuals).

A Bright Star in Bethlehem is a resource written by Mitri Raheb, pastor of Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, Palestine. This devotional is ideal for adults and older youth, but comes with a booklet of scripture and stickers that is suitable for young children.

A Blues Christmas Concert

Sat., Dec. 7, at 7 pm

A classical, pop and blues-filled concert featuring performances by EL CEO (East Liberty Community Engagement Orchestra); the Hope Academy middle school Rock Band; HAT Co (Hope Academy Teen Theater Company) joined by Bob Giacometti and Katie Simone from the Blues Society of Western PA; plus Hope Academy student Zoe Zielinski, winner of the 2013 Blues Society of Western PA’s Youth Blues Challenge.

This free concert is a great way to kick off the holiday season in the beautiful ELPC Sanctuary. Donations will be accepted to help send Zoe Zielinski to Memphis, Tenn., where she will perform in the Youth Showcase of the Internationals Blues Challenge in January 2014.