

Livestream Services

Our services are being livestreamed on YouTube, Facebook, and Zoom. For more details, visit ELPC.church.

Sunday Services

**Celebration of the Lord's Supper*

Journey Worship | 8:45 am

Theme: Jubilee

Dec. 6* Rev. Heather Schoenewolf

Dec. 13 Rev. Dr. Randy Bush

Dec. 20 Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy

Dec. 27 No service

Sanctuary Worship | 11 am

Dec. 6* Rev. Dr. Randy Bush

Dec. 13 Rev. Dr. Randy Bush

Dec. 20 Rev. Dr. Randy Bush

Dec. 27 Rev. Dr. Randy Bush



Can You Hear What I Hear?

Even though we continue to gather “virtually” as a community of faith, we will still celebrate the story of Christ’s birth together! Join the kids of ELPC on **Sun., Dec. 13**, 10 am, via Zoom for our annual Christmas Pageant. Led by kids of all ages, we will hear once more the good news that in Christ, God is with us always. Please contact Megan Leisher for the Zoom link if you’d like to attend!

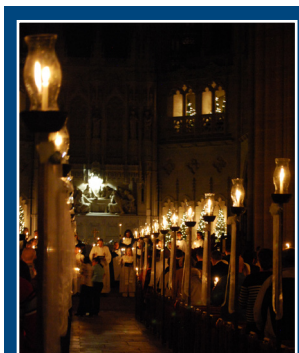
Christmas Pageant Scavenger Hunt

Help us tell the story of Jesus’ birth! Persons of all ages are invited to collect any of these items and participate in the pageant when prompted: **bell**; **flashlight**; **bathrobe** (to be a Shepherd); **halo**, **wings**, or **white/sparkling shirt** (to be an Angel); **wooden blocks/spoons** or **soup cans** (to make the sound of donkey hooves); and a **sign that expresses “JOY!”** (maybe it reads “Christ is born!” or “Glory to God!” or “God is with us!” or “Rejoice!”).

Taizé Prayer Service

Wednesdays | 7 pm

Rev. BJ Woodworth



Christmas Eve at ELPC

The Christmas season will be different this year. Because of the pandemic, there will be fewer chances to gather as families and celebrate with friends, and sadly no opportunity to come together in church on Christmas Eve. However, we are bringing the special Christmas Eve services to you.

Our **Friends & Family service**, 5 pm, and our traditional **Candlelight service**, 8 pm, will be filmed in advance and made available for viewing

on **Thurs., Dec. 24**, on our YouTube and Facebook pages. They also will be available at ELPC.church so that you can watch them as often as you’d like!

The early service will feature an intergenerational celebration of Christ’s birth—including video segments, carols, and a sermon by Pastor Heather. The late service will have special music, Christmas quotes, and a sermon by Pastor Randy. Both services will include communion and a candle-lit version of “Silent Night.”

May the good news of Christ’s birth make its way into your homes this Christmas Eve.

Advent Gift Boxes

Even though we will not be able to gather for worship in the church building, we will still celebrate Advent and Christmas together. The Faith Formation Board is supplying the congregation with special Advent boxes, filled with a devotional, wreath, activities, and treats!

If you have not yet picked up your Advent Gift Box, please contact Megan Leisher at MeganL@coh.net or **412.441.3800 x122**.



East Liberty Presbyterian Church

info@coh.net | 412.441.3800

Staff Leadership

The Rev. Dr. Randall K. Bush

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Pastoral Message

The Rev. Dr. Randall K. Bush, Pastor



Let me begin with a wonderful quote from a recent newspaper article by Ian Corbin. “The anthropologist Margaret Mead was once asked to identify the earliest material sign of human civilization. Obvious candidates would be tool production, agricultural methods, art. Her answer was this: a 15,000-year-old femur that had broken and healed. The healing process for a broken femur takes approximately six weeks, and in that time, the wounded person could not work, hunt or flee from predators. He or she would need to be cared for, carried during that time of

helplessness. This kind of support, Dr. Mead pointed out, does not occur in the rest of the animal kingdom, nor was it a feature of pre-human hominids. Our way of coping with weakness...is what sets us apart as a species.”

The language of Advent and Christmas will be all around us this month. We are focused on the birth of Jesus Christ over 2,000 years ago, which by faith, we profess to be God’s incarnation among us on earth. It’s true that 2,000 years was a very long time ago; but it’s also true that human beings developed and evolved for thousands of years prior to that first Christmas in Bethlehem. As much as we see the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as the pivotal moment in history, it is important to remember how even that special event needed to be carefully prepared by a loving God.

Before Jesus, there was a time of turmoil, of world power shifting between Assyria, Babylon, Greece, and Rome. Before that, there were city-states rising and falling around the shoreline of the Mediterranean Sea, with the tribes of Israel ruled by prophets and kings. Before that, there were times of nomadic wandering from the Mesopotamian river valley to the land of ancient Palestine—a time shaped by the stories associated with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses.

And before that? The biblical record at that point becomes fuzzy. It tells sagas about creation, a huge flood, and a tower of Babel that led to people being scattered over the face of the Earth. Yet even those narratives affirm that God has been at work throughout the history of humankind.

If Margaret Mead is right, then our way of coping with weakness and acting compassionately toward one another is what sets us apart as a species. Fifteen thousand years ago, hominids cared for one of their own with a broken leg—giving protection and providing care to one made vulnerable by mishap or age. What can we do today so that our modern human species might be known by the same quality?

That is a critical question at Christmastime. The incarnation of Christ was the fullest expression of God’s compassion for us—a pattern of love that stretches back to our earliest days as a species and that stretches forward to whatever horizon lies ahead of us. For in the fullness of time, a helpless child was born; a Savior was entrusted to us. May we honor the love at the heart of the Christmas miracle by “paying it forward,” by responding to the needs of those around us with compassion, care, and gratitude. For that is what makes us truly human and reflects the image of God.

Randy Bush

Mission Matters

The Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy, Associate Pastor for Mission Ministries

Eradicating Systemic Poverty | Addressing Food Instability in the Community

One sign of systemic poverty is food insecurity. Although our East Liberty neighborhood is considered a food oasis—a community where there are numerous food stores and opportunities to secure needed nutrition—hunger and food instability is still a daily reality for some of our neighbors.



ELPC, you have responded to the needs of our shared community once again. Following our Drive-by Stewardship and Fall Food Drive Sunday, a van load of non-perishable food items was donated to EECM to assist our neighbors who are food insecure. Thank you!

Each year, the ELPC Board of Deacons provide gift cards to ELPC and community families who need assistance to be financially able to

celebrate Thanksgiving. This year was no different. Again, thanks to the generosity of ELPC members. Your faithfulness allowed us to ensure that **71 families** received gifts cards to assist with their Thanksgiving dinners. Families were referred from ELPC ministries—including our Christian Education, Youth and Young Adult, Hope Academy, and Mission Ministries—and partner organizations—such as Casa San José and the Neighborhood Family Support Center.

Although these ministry food programs do not address the systemic nature of poverty, feeding our neighbors helps to mitigate and address their immediate need. Jesus said it best...as much as you have done it unto the least of these, you have done it unto me.

Thank you, ELPC.

Help Develop and Sustain Our Pastoral Leadership



Each year during the Advent and Christmas season, we turn our eyes to Bethlehem and celebrate the wondrous gift of Jesus Christ, our Savior.

God has blessed the church with incredible leadership in every time and place, but those leaders often need to be supported by their communities as well. The Christmas Joy Offering addresses the support needed by our leaders—including leadership development programs in communities of color and Presbyterian church workers in their time of need.

Will you consider supporting this offering when you receive a Christmas Joy Offering envelope in the mail from the Mission Board? The offering will be received on **Sun., Dec. 20**.

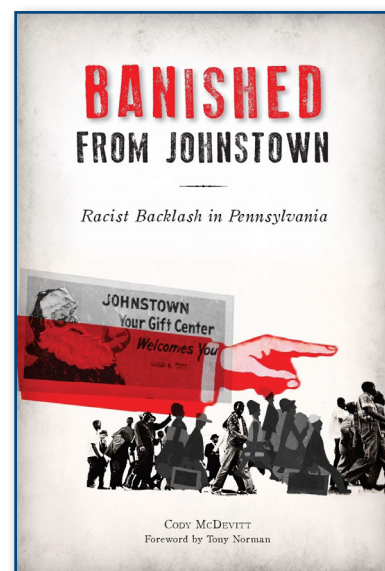
Session News

At its last meeting, the ELPC Session:

- Discussed the optimal size for our Session and getting new members on all committees
- Continued conversation about building usage and the nature of safe, in-person events at church
- Heard updates on the Stewardship Campaign and 2021 budget
- Reflected on upcoming Christmas events, Advent activities, and Spiritual Life offerings

February Book Discussion

On **Sun., Feb. 28**, during the adult Church School hour and following Sanctuary worship, Cody McDevitt, author of *Banished from Johnstown*, will lead a discussion of his book and detail one of the worst civil rights injustices in the history of Pennsylvania.



Members are encouraged to read the book prior to the discussion.

Please contact Pastor Patrice at **PatriceFS@coh.net** or **412.441.3800 x130** if you want to borrow a copy of the book. More information to come.

Christian Education

The Rev. Heather Schoenewolf, Associate Pastor for Educational Ministries

Church School News & Notes

There will be no adult Church School classes on **Sun., Dec. 13, Dec. 27, or Jan. 3.**

Children and youth classes will meet on Sunday afternoons on Zoom. Adult classes will meet on Sundays, 9:45 am, on Zoom, unless noted otherwise. Links to adult classes will be included in the *Worship at ELPC* email news flashes each Friday. If you do not receive the news flash, contact Megan Leisher at MeganL@coh.net or **412.441.3800 x122**.

Middle School | Grades 6–8

We are narrating the Christmas Pageant again this year and will be meeting online to practice. Email Sara Hackett for more information.

High School | Grades 9–12

We will meet on **Sun., Dec. 20**, 12:30–1:30 pm. If you haven't participated in Church School yet this year and want to join in our monthly class, register online or contact Sara Hackett for the Zoom link and other details.

Journey with Scripture

Facilitators: Lora Bethea and Jan Lyle Irvin

"I am the Alpha and the Omega...who is and who was and who is to come."—Revelation 1:8

This month, we begin a new series of readings entitled, *The Apocrypha and The Apocalypse – Word Hidden and Revealed*. In the next few months, we will read and reflect upon the Book of Revelation with reference to contemporary interpretations including feminist and African American perspectives. Each week, we also will read a Psalm and a selection from one of the 15 books of the Apocrypha. These books were written in the period just prior to the New Testament. While not recognized as authoritative by many churches, they have nonetheless inspired poets, artists, composers, ministers, and citizens through the centuries. Join us on the journey!

Dec. 6: Psalm 57, Susanna 1–27, Revelation 1:1–20

Dec. 20: Psalm 53, Susanna 28–63, Revelation 2:1–29

Parenting Circle

Facilitators: Trish Buben

Dec. 6 & 20: Advent and Christmas Season Sharing

This month, we will continue discussing excerpts from Lauren Burdette's book, *This Life that is Ours*, and how her insights connect to our unique perspectives and experiences of parenthood. Each class will have time for personal sharing and reflection on brief readings from the book. All people involved in parenting are welcome to join us, even if you haven't read the book. For a copy of the book, please contact Pastor Heather.

Seekers

Facilitator: Gwen Puza

Dec. 6: Embracing A Mexican Advent Tradition: Exploring La Posada

Kathryn Ophardt, our intern from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, will tell us about an Advent tradition called "La Posada" (The Inn), which she experienced in Mexico. We will learn about this tradition and consider what it has to teach us about the practice of radical hospitality. The study will focus on the traditional "Posada" song that puts us in the place of the different characters in the story of Mary and Joseph looking for shelter as they made their way to Bethlehem for the census.

Dec. 20: God-bearer, Mary and You and Me

Theotokos, God-bearer, is a title used for Mary the mother of God, especially in Eastern Christianity. In what ways are we all God-bearers? Through words, art, and music, the Rev. BJ Woodworth will lead our exploration of the mystery and gift of the original God-bearer, Mary, and ponder how we all, like Mary, carry the Christ within us and bear the Christ to the world.

Soul Food

Facilitators: Rev. Joe Hajdu and other class members

Dec. 6: Falling Upward

We will wrap up our discussion of chapters 1–6 of *Falling Upward*, by Richard Rohr. New participants are welcome, online or by phone. Contact the Rev. Joe Hajdu at hajdu625@comcast.net for more details.

Dec. 20 & 27: Advent and Christmas Season Sharing

We will gather together for an informal time of Advent and Christmas season sharing.

Children & Youth Ministry

Sara Hackett, Coordinator of Christian Ed. & Youth Ministry

Sun., Dec. 6: Youth Mission Project | Christmas Shopping 12:30–1:30 pm
Youth in grades 6–12 are doing some online Christmas shopping for kids in foster care. Let Sara Hackett know if you want to join us for pizza (delivered to you to bake at home) and shopping!

Wed., Dec. 30: Tween Night | Cosmic Bowling 7–8pm
Twins in grades 4–6 will gather on Zoom to build our own glow-in-the-dark bowling alleys! Supplies will be provided, so please RSVP to Sara Hackett.

Young Adult Ministry

Kelli Booher, Interim Coordinator of Young Adult Ministries

For all virtual event questions, please contact Kelli Booher at KelliB@coh.net. Be sure to check your emails for weekly updates. If you are not on the Young Adult Ministry (YAM) email list and would like to join, please contact Kelli.

Wed., Dec. 9: Do the Write Thing 8–9 pm
This year has been historic in many ways. We want to collectively share our experiences and perspectives by creating a time capsule. One of the items we will include in the capsule is a questionnaire with preset questions, but we also will add questions that we have for each other. Whether you write, type, voice text, use communication symbols, or draw, please join us as we recap 2020!

Sun., Dec. 13: Sunday Social Lunch 12:30–2 pm
Log on to enjoy your lunch, socialize, and find out about YAM's New Year's Eve plans! We'll discuss what to collect for the time capsule and provide information about a t-shirt making event.

Thurs., Dec. 24: Christmas Eve Candlelight Service
ELPC will have prerecorded Christmas Eve services available at 5 pm and 8 pm, but YAMs also will gather and lead a Virtual YAM Candlelight Service. If you would like to help, please contact Kelli.

Thurs., Dec. 31: New Year's Eve "Early" Party 3–4 pm
Let us gather together (six feet apart), bringing our items that reflect this past year and place them in the YAM 2020 Time Capsule. If you are participating in the t-shirt making event, wear your shirt! Let's ring in the New Year...early! This will be held in the Second Floor Parlor at ELPC.



Connecting with YAMs

Follow [@elpcyoungadults](#) on Facebook and Instagram or check your emails!

We're getting to know Young Adult Ministry (YAM) members and have been asking questions to discover the serious and silly sides of our YAM members.

club one sixteen notes

We will meet on **Wed., Dec. 2, 9, and 16**, before taking a holiday break.

Our regular schedule will resume on **Wed., Jan. 13**.

Support the Christmas Giving Tree

There's still time to support the Giving Tree! If you have not had an opportunity to make a financial or gift card donation, please prayerfully consider supporting this cause. There is great need in our community.

As in years past, the ELPC Deacons are organizing the Christmas Giving Tree to benefit children and families from ELPC's Mission, Christian Education, and Hope Academy ministries, as well as East End Cooperative Ministry (EECM) and Casa San José.



This year's Giving Tree is different. There will be no physical gifts, only \$25 gift cards to stores like Target and Walmart or prepaid Mastercard/Visa cards. Instead of having the Giving Tree signup before or after our worship services, we will be using SignUpGenius.

Learn more at tiny.cc/elpc-giving-tree.

The ELPC Deacon Board thanks the congregation for its enthusiastic support of this ministry.

World AIDS Day Service to be Livestreamed

The PGH Equality Center is partnering with Community House Presbyterian Church to host a virtual World AIDS Day ecumenical worship service on **Tues., Dec. 1**, 6 pm.

You're encouraged to join in as many faith communities come together to spread awareness about HIV/AIDS.

For more details and livestream links, please visit ELPC.church.

Experience Our New Bilingual Meditation Group

Refuge of the Heart is a new bilingual Spanish-English meditation group that meets on Tuesdays, 7 pm, via Zoom. Each meditation is shared in Spanish and English.

In partnership with Casa San José, we hope to unite our communities and share a sacred moment, trusting that God's voice transcends the boundaries of language. Inspired by contemplative prayer, this time of meditation hopes to offer space to rest, reflect, and explore God's presence in our lives.



If you're interested in participating, please contact Kathryn Ophardt at kophardt@pts.edu or the Rev. BJ Woodworth at BJW@coh.net.

Presbyterian Women

PW Virtual Bible Study: Lamenting Death

Tues., Dec. 1 10 am–12 pm | **Mon., Dec. 7** 7–8:30 pm

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted”—Matthew 5:4. How we long to be comforted when a loved one dies. Death is all around us. Deaths from the COVID-19 pandemic exceed 250,000 in the U.S. People continue to die of more familiar and individual causes: old age, disease, accidents, and violence.

Sorrow, suffering, and grief characterize both mourning and lament. However, lament boldly asks God to act. Lamenting may be the only way to respond to atrocity and fear—pandemic, genocide, ethnic cleansing, and mass violence. We can lament, trusting that God hears and will act.

Zoom information for our Bible Study will be emailed on **Fri., Nov. 27**. For more information, contact PW.ELPC@gmail.com.

Note: We will not meet for Sharing Lament in December.



Refuge of the Heart Q&A

by the Rev. BJ Woodworth

I was super excited when Pastor Randy proposed the idea that I collaborate with Kathryn Ophardt, our intern from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, on a bilingual meditation group. I thought to myself, what a great way to bridge cultural and linguistic gaps, through shared silence and space. I grew even more excited after talking with Kathryn and hearing her own history and passion for this in Mexico. So, I asked her three simple questions that I hope will excite you as well.

- 1. Tell us about the history and vision for the Refuge of the Heart group.**
Refuge of the Heart started as a chaplaincy program for a refugee resettlement organization where I served this past summer in Mexico City. I developed weekly meditations for those seeking asylum along with the organization's volunteers and employees. With their blessing, I adapted those meditations to our context to help our Spanish-speaking and English-speaking communities connect around a shared experience of meditation and prayer.
- 2. Why do you believe meditation to be a bilingual and cross-cultural tool?**
Though it may sound ironic, silence transcends language barriers. It is true that there are challenges when trying to communicate with someone who speaks a different language than you, but bilingual meditations allow people to come together and share a moment of silence and spiritual reflection with one another. Since everything will be translated, we will be able to bridge the barriers that otherwise separate us from our neighbors.
- 3. What are your hopes for this group at ELPC?**
I hope that Refuge of the Heart will be an opportunity to bridge the Spanish-speaking and English-speaking population, opening not just the virtual doors of our church, but also open up our hearts to one another. This also is a wonderful opportunity to have exposure to another language and remember that God speaks all languages and is beyond all languages, so it is a beautiful reminder that what we may not understand could be God speaking to someone else.

LGBTQ Ministry

Wil Forrest, Coordinator of LGBTQ Ministry



Sun., Dec. 20: Spiritual Gathering 12:30 pm
Join us to share meeting time and fellowship via Zoom as we get to know the Rev. BJ Woodworth, ELPC's new director of Spiritual Life and minister of Taizé. We also will share in a spiritual practice together. Allies and LGBTQIA+ folks alike are welcome.

Contact Wil Forrest at Wil@coh.net or **412.441.3800 x118** for more details.

God Created You. God Loves You. Be Yourself.

Alternative Christmas Gift List

Let this year's Christmas shopping help people in need and share the good news of the gospel in creative, justice-oriented ways. Instead of scarves, socks, and "stuff," why not make a donation to a worthwhile cause in the name of a friend or family member?

Here are a few ideas to consider—locally, nationally, and internationally. If you don't know what these groups do, ask...or do a quick internet search!

- Greater Pittsburgh Food Bank
- East End Cooperative Ministries
- Heifer Project
- Just Harvest
- Open Hand Ministries
- The Neighborhood Academy
- RIP Medical Debt
- Save the Children
- Presbyteriangifts.pcusa.org (Water Filtration Projects, Educate a Child, etc.)
- Bukit Bail Fund
- New Voices Pittsburgh (focused on health and well-being of Black women and girls in Pennsylvania and Ohio)
- Steel Smiling (helping Black people access mental health support)

ELPC People

If you have news to share, contact Megan Leisher at MeganL@coh.net or **412.441.3800 x122**.

Good News

- Please welcome our new members, **Monique Jackson** and **Jivani Turner**.
- Congratulations to two children who celebrated their baptisms on November 1.
 - **William Fitzpatrick Teacoach**, son of Cameron and Jonathan Teacoach (family on left in picture)
 - **Karon Grace Dames**, daughter of Elizabeth and Ketric Dames (family on right in picture)



Thanks

- Florence Johnson thoroughly appreciated the many birthday cards she received from church members. Thank you!

Prayers

- We offer our prayers and condolences to the family and friends of those who recently passed away:
 - Dorothy Autore
 - Mike O'Donnell
 - Adrianna Cleveland's grandmother
 - Heather Lawrence's sister, Christine
 - Larry Sweeney's mother
 - Rev. Christiane Dutton's sister
 - Lawrence (Larry) White's sister, Egypt
- We also offer our prayers to Larry Sweeney's sister, who is battling pneumonia.



Elders from ELPC and Calvin Presbyterian Church (Zelienople) recently gathered together on Zoom to foster dialogue in the recent, divisive, pre-election season.

“...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.”

ELPC Building Closures

The ELPC building will be closed for Christmas on **Fri. & Mon., Dec. 25 & 28**, and for New Year's Day, **Fri., Jan. 1**.

Virtual Coffee Hour

Join us after Sanctuary worship on **Sun., Dec. 13**, 12:15 pm, for a virtual coffee hour. We'll enjoy fellowship and talk about the upcoming Christmas Concert, Blue Christmas service, and Christmas Eve services.

Christmas in East Liberty

Join us on **Fri., Dec. 18**, 7 pm, for our virtual *Christmas in East Liberty* concert and relive some of our favorite Christmas performances by The Brass Roots, organist Dr. Edward Alan Moore, and the ELPC Chancel Choir!

Watch live on our YouTube or Facebook pages. Please visit ELPC.church for more details.



Blue Christmas Service

This year has brought many challenges to our physical, emotional, and spiritual lives. As the season of Christ's birth approaches, the ELPC Deacons invite you to our Blue Christmas service on **Sat., Dec. 19**, 7 pm.

Join us on YouTube or Facebook for this service of strength, hope and community, and feel God's presence in this time of unprecedented isolation, loss, and distress. Visit ELPC.church for details.



Church Building Updates

Our church building remains closed to the public, but the staff is using it for work and some small events are happening in our space. Due to the worsening pandemic, we also were forced to curtail offering in-person worship on Sundays. Our Property Committee and Session will continue to monitor safety guidelines and protocols for our church, and will re-visit the possibility of in-person worship early in the new year.

Please watch for updates at ELPC.church and continue to pray for our staff, congregation, and ministries during these challenging times.