

# Reaching Out

newsletter of east liberty presbyterian church

December 2023



## The Pajama Pageant

Join us for a special re-telling of the story of Jesus' birth on **Sun., Dec. 10, 10 am**, in the Sanctuary. Led by the children and youth of our church and once again written by the Rev. Ashely DeTar-Birt, this original pageant weaves contemporary questions with the Good News of our faith.

Following the pageant, all are invited to enjoy a hot chocolate reception in the Fellowship Room!

All kids in grade 8 or lower are invited to participate! There will be a dress rehearsal on Sat., Dec. 9, 9:30 am.



## Join Us for Worship this Christmas Eve

The season of Advent and Christmas is a time of joy and celebration. And this year, we are thankful to be able to celebrate the good news of Christ's birth together. Join us for our services on **Christmas Eve, Sun., Dec. 24:**

- Sanctuary Worship Service | 11 am  
Led by Pastor BJ
- Friends & Family Service | 4 pm  
Led by Pastor Heather
- Candlelight Service | 10 pm  
Led by Pastor Patrice

## Sunday Services

*\*Celebration of the Lord's Supper*

### Journey Worship | 8:45 am

*Theme: Seeking Love*

Dec. 3\* Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy  
Dec. 10 Rev. Heather Schoenewolf  
Dec. 17 Rev. BJ Woodworth  
Dec. 24 No Service  
Dec. 31 No Service

### Sanctuary Worship | 11 am

Dec. 3\* Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy  
Dec. 10 Rev. Heather Schoenewolf  
Dec. 17 Rev. BJ Woodworth  
Dec. 24 Rev. BJ Woodworth  
Dec. 31 To be determined

## Taizé Prayer Service

**Prayerful Song & Quiet Meditation**

*Wednesdays | 7 pm*

Rev. BJ Woodworth

## Attend Our Blue Christmas Service

During the holiday season, there is an expectation to be happy and filled with festive joy. Sadly, many people are struggling emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually. Through loss, heartache, sadness, or grief, some of us have trouble being in the holiday spirit.

ELPC's Board of Deacons will host our annual Blue Christmas Service on **Fri., Dec. 8, 7 pm**, in the Chapel. This special service offers comfort and healing in a time of darkness, and is intended to help people hold onto the nativity message of hope.



## East Liberty Presbyterian Church

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### Staff Leadership

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East Liberty  
Presbyterian Church

www.ELPC.church

## Pastoral Message

*The Rev. Heather Schoenewolf*

*Acting Co-Pastor and Pastor for Educational Ministries*



Disruptive. Confusing. Scary. Exciting. Disorienting.

Have you ever experienced a situation or a season in your life that could be marked by any or all of these words?

As I reflect upon the events of my life, I can name many—from the loss of my first baby tooth to the first day of college to the death of my father—that can be marked by most or all of these adjectives. If I were to make a list of such events, it is likely that the first ones I would write down would be those I'd consider **hard**: switching schools, being hospitalized for back surgery, divorce in my family...

But I noticed that as my list grew longer it would include events I'd consider to be quite **positive** milestones: learning to drive, being called to Seminary, giving birth to my child...

Although I'm writing this letter in November, planning for the Advent and Christmas celebrations has been well underway for weeks. It is clear that so much of what we do to prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus is festive, comforting, and even fun. We decorate, we bake, we gather with loved ones, we listen to our favorite music, we prepare to exchange gifts. We do this in many faithful ways as a church too.

Yet when the circumstances of our own lives don't reflect the festive, comfortable or fun energy of the season our own feelings of grief or isolation may be magnified. It can be hard to find ourselves in the story of Jesus' birth. We might miss God's promises to us in seasons we might deem hard or circumstances from which we'd like to escape. In these instances, our shared celebration of Jesus' birth can be a disruptive, confusing, or disorienting event unto itself.

Now, don't get me wrong. I am definitely someone who thinks that Jesus' birth is one of the most exciting reasons for celebration in our lives. But I think that we do ourselves and our siblings a disservice if we neglect to notice, name and explore the reality that Jesus' actual birth was a disruptive, confusing, scary, exciting, and disorienting event. It upended the lives of vulnerable individuals and changed the course of history.

This truth is something I believe we need to explore and even embrace as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus. It's a practice that encourages us as a people of faith to not simply pick-and-choose which aspects of faith or the Bible we cling to, but pulls us into a more complex and substantive experience of faith—individually and collectively.

*Continued on page 3...*

# Mission Matters

The Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy  
Acting Co-Pastor and Pastor for Mission Ministries

## Christmas Joy Offering to be Received

Many of us spend a lot of time in search of perfect Christmas gifts—gifts that communicate to friends and family how much we know and love them. For those of us who gather in Advent expectation, we know that the only perfect gift ever given was the one we received in Jesus Christ.

The Christmas Joy Offering celebrates the coming of Jesus Christ, the “perfect gift” from a gracious God, and helps us respond to God’s gift with generous gifts that support church leaders—retired, present, and future—who have pointed us to God. For church workers in need of financial help, whether due to declining health or a catastrophic event, the Christmas Joy Offering provides for those needs through the Assistance Program of the Board of Pensions. The Christmas Joy Offering also supports new leaders for our church and world, through the ministry of Presbyterian-related schools and colleges equipping communities of color.

When we receive the Christmas Joy Offering on **Sun., Dec. 17**, may you give generously in thanksgiving to God for the most perfect gift of all, the gift of Jesus Christ.



# Pastoral Message Continued...

I imagine that some of you might find this assertion to be off-putting...or at least a curious one. We know all too well that the events of our world are disrupting, confusing, scary, exciting and disorienting ENOUGH as it is! We don’t necessarily need MORE of that...we need MORE joy, peace, hope, and love!

I would argue that the two are not mutually exclusive. The Advent and Christmas season before us, in fact, reminds us of this reality! Along with all that was/is disrupting, confusing, scary, exciting and disorienting about Jesus’ birth, Jesus’ birth calls us to rejoice, be peacemakers, instigators of hope and ambassadors of love.

This duality reminds us, too, of the promise of the Incarnation. God put on flesh and dwelt among us—experiencing the difficult aspects of human living, embodying the promise that God IS WITH US, ALWAYS...in the moments that are disorienting and difficult, and in the moments of hope and peace.

People of faith, THIS truth is cause for joy. May we witness God’s presence among us—in seasons of transition, seasons of grief, seasons of fresh starts, seasons of new opportunity, seasons of struggle, seasons of peace...and may the reality of GOD WITH US, ALWAYS give us strength, courage, hope, and love.

*Pastor Heather*

## Community Partner and Advocate Award

On Sept. 27, East Liberty Development, Inc. (ELID), hosted an Impact Report release party highlighting all the organization’s accomplishments over the last 20+ years and recognizing all the organizations, agencies, developers, and individuals who were instrumental in the diversification of the East Liberty community. ELPC received the *Community Partner and Advocate* award for being a steady partner by devoting time/staff and member volunteers, offering the church building—hosting community meetings and installing the water remediation rain garden—and investing in many ELID projects, including the redevelopment of the Penn-Highland Building, scattered site affordable housing, and other projects throughout the years. Learn more at [EastLiberty.org](http://EastLiberty.org).



# Christian Education

The Rev. Heather Schoenewolf  
Acting Co-Pastor and Pastor for Educational Ministries

## Church School Updates

There will be no Church School classes on **Sun., Dec. 10, 24, or 31**. Classes for learners of all ages will resume on Sun., Jan. 7.

As a reminder, our annual Christmas Pageant will take place on Sun., Dec. 10.

## Children & Youth

Our children and youth are deeply spiritual people with great theological questions. To foster these gifts and to help students learn the stories, vocabulary, and actions of the Christian life in a loving community, ELPC offers Church School classes for kids and youth from pre-K-grade 12. Class locations are listed below.

- Pre-K | Nursery
- K-Grade 3 | Room 206
- Grades 4-6 | Room 211
- Grades 7-12 | Second Floor Parlor

## Journey with Scripture | Fellowship Room

Facilitators: Rev. Henk Bossers

Go on a journey with us in December as we study the Bible's Advent and Christmas passages and windows.

## Parenting Circle | Room 213

Facilitator: Trish Buben and other class members

### December: Weekly Gatherings

Anyone involved in parenting is welcome to join us. We share experiences, resources, prayer, and scripture as we explore how our faith builds and nourishes our family lives, as well as nurtures our parent/child relationships.

## Soul Food | Good Samaritan Room & Zoom

Facilitators: Rev. Joe Hajdu and other class members

**Dec. 3:** We will conclude our discussion of *Barking to the Choir* with a discussion of chapter 10.

**Dec. 17:** We will reflect on Advent and Christmas using narratives from all four gospels.

New participants are welcome! For more information, contact the Rev. Joe Hajdu at [hajdu625@comcast.net](mailto:hajdu625@comcast.net).

**Note:** Classes meet on Sundays, 9:45am.

## Seekers | Garth Overlook Room & Zoom

Facilitator: Gwen Puza, [gpuza9@gmail.com](mailto:gpuza9@gmail.com)

### Dec. 3: Examining Troubling Words of Jesus from an Historical, Jewish Perspective

Dr. Amy-Jill Levine is Jewish, and is an author and New Testament scholar. In this video, Dr. Levine will discuss her book *The Difficult Words of Jesus*. She examines troubling words of Jesus from an historical, Jewish standpoint, helping us to hear Jesus' words as a 1st century Jew.



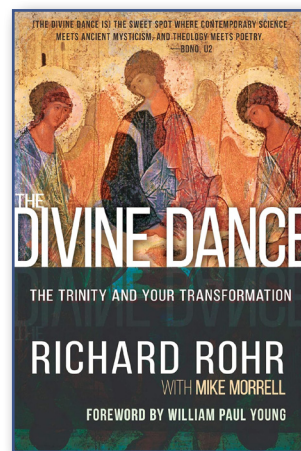
### Dec. 17: Addressing a Perceived Conflict Between Science and Faith

In this video, mathematician, philosopher, and apologist John Lennox gives a remarkable discussion about how faith is intimately connected with science. He explains the erroneous thinking of scientists who are atheist. He says that faith is not a belief where there is no evidence, but, instead, faith is a belief based on evidence.

### Seekers in January

Rev. Dr. Bob Chesnut (ELPC Pastor from 1988–2002) will be with us, via Zoom, for two weeks, to discuss the Trinity, based on Richard Rohr's book, *Divine Dance*. Rev. Dr. Chesnut believes that "the doctrine of the Trinity is one of the very richest treasures of our Christian faith, but also one of the most neglected and misunderstood."

There are four books available at Carnegie Library, or you can buy used copies from Amazon for less than \$3.



# Children & Youth Ministry

Sara Hackett, Director of Christian Education & Youth Ministry

**Sun., Dec. 17: Confirmation Class** 12:15–3 pm

This month, our Confirmation Class will meet in the Second Floor Parlor to reflect on worship, dig into atonement theory, and explore scripture. Contact Sara Hackett at [SaraH@coh.net](mailto:SaraH@coh.net) for more details.

## Advent Devotionals Now Available

The Faith Formation Board is providing Advent Devotionals for persons of all ages to encourage us all to pause and reflect upon God's engagement in our lives during this special season. Printed devotional materials are available at the church. Links to online resources are below.

### Naming Jesus: A Family-Friendly Advent Devotional

Great for families with older elementary students and teens, *Naming Jesus: A Family-Friendly Advent Devotional* is all about the many names we give to Jesus, and the life-changing names he gives to us. "Naming Jesus" features a simple, home-based Advent service for each week, including a scripture passage, reflection, and prayer. Several accessible, family-friendly practices round out each week, all designed to bring a little more meaning and mystery to your Christmas preparations and celebrations—plus a few "anytime" activities to do along the way. Printed copies can be picked up at ELPC.

### Advent in Full Color

Imagine journeying through this Advent devotional with poetry by Mary Oliver and Howard Thurman, fresh daily practices, vivid scriptural passages, and accessible, bite-sized meditations on the season's key theological themes—all wrapped up in an interactive, intergenerational coloring book. Great for all ages, *Advent in Full Color* is a modern and theologically rich devotional coloring book that evokes the season's deeper meanings and mysteries. Printed copies can be picked up at ELPC.

### Bless the Advent we Actually Have

You'll find daily short reflections, scripture to mull over, blessings to pray, and discussion questions to ask around the dinner table in this devotional by Kate Bowler. Use this guide on your own, with your family, or grab a few friends to join you. This Advent Devotional will be a way for you to make the very act of waiting, holy. And as you anticipate Christ's birth together, may you experience the stubborn hope of Christmas, joy in the midst of so much sorrow, a love that knows no bounds, and a transcendent peace amid a world on fire and let's bless the Advent we actually have. Download a printable copy at [bit.ly/3QTLwWy](https://bit.ly/3QTLwWy).

### Another Starry Black Night: A Womanist Advent Devotional

Published by Unbound, a ministry of the PC(USA), Another Starry Black Night: A Womanist Advent Devotional takes you on a journey with amazing writers during this Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany seasons. Unbound is an interactive Journal of Christian Social Justice that examines, expresses, and encourages commitments to social justice as inspired by the prophetic gospel of Jesus Christ. Unbound seeks to experience and express different perspectives that further the Kin-dom of God and move us toward the arc of justice. Download a printable copy at [bit.ly/49Kw9Uh](https://bit.ly/49Kw9Uh).

## Holiday Gathering for Young Adults

On **Sun., Dec. 3**, all young adults (age 18 through 30s) are baking cookies and building community after worship. Tomato soup and grilled cheese will be served for lunch. Meet us in the Social Hall!

If you have a favorite recipe you want to share email Sara Hackett so she can gather ingredients.

Questions? Reach out to Sara Hackett at [SaraH@coh.net](mailto:SaraH@coh.net).



## club one sixteen

Kids and youth in grades 1–12 are invited to **club one sixteen**, our midweek ministry. We gather each Wednesday, 4:30–7 pm, for Bible Study, games, art, & dinner together.

**Note:** We will not gather on **Wed., Dec. 27**.

For more information, email Sara Hackett at [SaraH@coh.net](mailto:SaraH@coh.net).



## Session News

In November, the ELPC Session:

- Voted to approve the Ministry Discernment Profile and Job Description for our next pastor.
- Acted on requests to fund scholarships for African American youth as an act of outward facing reparations.
- Reviewed next steps in the 2024 Budget and Stewardship process.
- Considered a plan for Pastors Patrice and Heather to receive sabbaticals.

## Writing for Human Rights

Join Amnesty International Pittsburgh and many other inspiring Pittsburgh rights groups and community leaders for their annual Write-for-Rights event on **Mon., Dec. 11**, 6–9 pm, at Calvary Episcopal Church (315 Shady Ave., 15206).

This year marks the 38th annual gathering in Pittsburgh! During the event you can contribute to writing hundreds of letters on important human rights cases of our time.

Stop in and stay as long as you can. Write letters. Talk to other activists. Check out information tables about local groups working in Pittsburgh on local, national and international issues. There will be a candle-lighting ceremony at about 7:15 pm.

Case information, letter writing materials, and light refreshments will be provided. Attendees are encouraged to wear face coverings while not eating or drinking.

Learn more at [AmnestyPGH.org](https://www.AmnestyPGH.org).



## Presbyterian Women

**PW Bible Study: Mary and Martha**

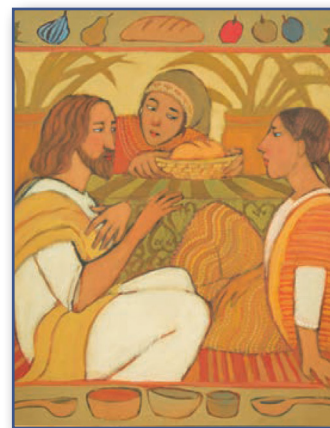
**Mon., Dec. 4** 7–8:30 pm (Zoom Only)

**Tues., Dec. 5** 10 am–12 pm (Hybrid)

The story of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38–42) is nestled among accounts of Jesus instructing his disciples. It is preceded by lessons on hospitality (Jesus sending out the Seventy-Two and the Parable of the Good Samaritan) and followed by Jesus teaching his disciples to pray. What might we learn about discipleship from this story of two sisters?

Those attending in person on Tuesday are invited to bring a bagged lunch. Beverages provided.

For more information and the Zoom link, email [PW.ELPC@gmail.com](mailto:PW.ELPC@gmail.com).



## Giving Thanks for the Gratitude Retreat

In November, 20 ELPC members ventured to the Villa Maria Retreat Center in Pulaski, Pennsylvania for a Gratitude Retreat. The weekend was a time well spent in community with others, providing an opportunity to slow down, reflect, pause, pray, and “forget not all of God’s benefits.” Here are some photos from our time together.



# LGBTQIA+ Ministry

Wil Forrest, Coordinator of LGBTQ Ministry



## Sun., Dec. 10: Spiritual Gathering

You are invited to attend our LGBTQIA+ Ministry's next Spiritual Gathering following our Sanctuary worship service. Join us and share lunch and conversation. Allies and LGBTQIA+ folks alike are welcome!

Questions? Contact Wil Forrest at [wil@coh.net](mailto:wil@coh.net) or 412.441.3800 x218.

## God Created You. God Loves You. Be Yourself.

## News From Your PNC

Dear ELPC Members, Friends, and Staff,

The members of the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) would like to share our progress since early October with you. As we let you know last month, the completion of the Ministry Discernment Profile (MDP) was our next step.

The MDP is the 11-page document that reflects who we are as a church, along with the talents and skills needed in our next pastoral leader. All the efforts which preceded this (the CAT Scan and the many Listening Sessions) were undertaken so we could prayerfully complete this form.

The good news is that as of November 16, 2023, we had completed the MDP and submitted it to Session. We are grateful to God to be able share that Session approved the MDP at their meeting on November 21.

Additionally, with the help of the Human Resources Chairs, Lora Bethea and Jen Hykes-Willson, as well as Polly McQueen of the PNC, the Senior Pastor job description has been updated and it has been approved by the HR Committee. We sincerely appreciate the work of the two HR Chairs, as well as their expeditious submission to the HR Committee.

As Jim Eng shared last month, the MDP will now be submitted to Pittsburgh Presbytery representatives for approval. Rev. Brian Wallace of Presbytery and Rev. Karen Rohrer, our Presbytery Liaison, have been notified of the approval by Session. Once we have Presbytery approval, the MDP will then be submitted to the Church Leadership Connection, who will post it online for all interested individuals to consider God's calling to our church. Rev. Rohrer has attended several of our meetings and has been a most helpful resource for us.

Thank you for your prayers; please keep them coming! It is our honor to serve our church family in this role.

—Linda Lane

*ELPC Pastor Nominating Committee: Doug Booth, Bill Buchanan, David Carl, Andrea DeVries, Jim Eng, Linda Lane (Chair), Rebecca McGregor (Secretary), Polly McQueen, Antwone Wright*

## ELPC People

If you have news to share, contact Megan Leisher at [MeganL@coh.net](mailto:MeganL@coh.net) or 412.441.3800 x122.

## Good News

- Congratulations to **Amber Harding** and **Samantha Gavin** who were married on October 14.
- Congratulations to **Anna Grace Baker-O'Donnell** and **William Fisher O'Donnell**, children of Jameson and Collyn O'Donnell, who were baptized on November 12. May God bless and guide you always!

## Thanks

- The ELPC Board of Deacons thanks you, ELPC members and friends! Your generosity provided gift cards that enabled 79 families to celebrate and share a Thanksgiving meal together in November!

## Prayers

We offer our prayers of comfort to the family and friends of those who recently passed away.

- Beth Bush's mother Charlotte Johnston
- Doris Dick's uncle Jack Martin
- Tim Engelhardt's uncle Kurt Engelhardt
- Beverly Harris-Schenz' mother
- Joel and Beth Minnigh's nephew Steve Minnigh, and their sister-in-law Kaye Crowther
- David Phillips' mother Nellie Ireland Phillips
- Cheryl Rhodes' mother
- Bob Starzynski's father
- Ron Stone's former wife Joan Morris

*"Blessed are those who die in the Lord, says the Spirit. They rest from their labors and their works follow them."*

*“As a diverse community of believers, we strive to follow God—the Creator who calls us, Jesus who teaches us, and the Spirit who empowers us. We show God’s unconditional love by providing a refuge for spiritual growth, ardently pursuing justice, and extending Christ’s radical hospitality to all.”*

## Building Closure

ELPC will be closed on **Mon. & Tues., Dec. 25 & 26**, in observance of **Christmas**.

## Christmas in East Liberty

ELPC’s *Cathedral Concerts* series will continue on **Fri., Dec. 15**, 7:30 pm, with our annual holiday tradition, Christmas in East Liberty.

This special concert will feature The Brass Roots with conductor Daniel Nesta Curtis, the ELPC Chancel Choir, organist/music director Dr. Edward Alan Moore, and organist Ethan LaPlaca.

The concert is free and open to the public. Bring your family and friends!



## Ushers and Greeters Needed

We’re in need of ushers and greeters for our Christmas in East Liberty concert. This is one of our largest events each year and our greeters and ushers are always an important part of showing our hospitality to our guests.

If you’re interested in volunteering, contact Dr. Ed Moore at [EdM@coh.net](mailto:EdM@coh.net).

## All Church Retreat Details

Mark your calendars now for ELPC’s All Church Retreat, which will take place **Fri.–Sun., May 3–5**, at Lutherlyn Camp in Prospect, Pennsylvania. Whether you join us for the whole weekend or for Saturday only, we will have delicious meals, time to rest in creation, and intentional community building activities so you can get to know old friends better and meet new friends too. Workshops and worship will be intergenerational.

Want to help us plan the details? Reach out to Sara Hackett at [SaraH@coh.net](mailto:SaraH@coh.net). Look for registration and details in February.

