

Weekly Worship Schedule

Journey Service
Sundays | 8:45 am

No Journey service on December 29.

Sanctuary Service
Sundays | 11 am

Taizé Prayer Service
Wednesdays | 7 pm

No Taizé service on December 25.

Blue Christmas Service

The ELPC Board of Deacons invites you to ELPC's Blue Christmas service on **Friday, December 6**, 7 pm, in the Chapel.

The service is designed as a source of strength during what is a difficult season for many.



Building Closures

ELPC will be closed for Christmas on **Wednesday & Thursday, December 25 & 26**, and on New Year's Day, **Wednesday, January 1**.

A Retelling of the Christmas Story

Join us in the Sanctuary for a special re-telling of the story of Jesus' birth on **Sunday, December 15**, 10 am. Led by the children and youth of our church—and once again written by the Rev. Ashley DeTar-Birt—this original pageant helps us celebrate anew the good news of Jesus' birth.

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! And there are opportunities for middle- and high-school youth! See details on page 5. There will be a dress rehearsal on Saturday, December 14, 9:30 am.



Celebrate the Birth of the Christ Child

The seasons of Advent and Christmas provide a time of joy and celebration. Join us for our services on **Christmas Eve, Tuesday, December 24**. Both services will be held in the Sanctuary and feature the celebration of the Lord's Supper and candle lighting.

- Friends & Family Service | 5 pm
Led by Pastor Michael
- Candlelight Service | 10 pm
Led by Pastor Michael

East Liberty Presbyterian Church

info@coh.net | 412.441.3800

Staff Leadership

The Rev. Dr. Michael A. Diaz
Senior Pastor and Head of Staff
MichaelD@coh.net | x223

The Rev. Dr. Patrice L. Fowler-Searcy
Pastor for Mission Ministries
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The Rev. BJ Woodworth
Covenant Pastor for Spiritual Life,
Taizé, and Transitional Ministries
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Wil Forrest
Coordinator of LGBTQIA+ Ministry
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Sara Hackett
Director of Christian Education
and Youth Ministries
SaraH@coh.net | x220

Dr. Edward Alan Moore
Music Director and Organist
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Jim Tinnemeyer
Director of Administration and Facilities
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Rachelle Calfee
Bookkeeper
RachelleC@coh.net | x234

Jen King
Administrative Assistant to the Pastors
JenniferK@coh.net | x222

Norma Meyer
Administrative Assistant to Worship
& Music and Communications
Norma@coh.net | x211

The Rev. Dr. Robert Chesnut
Pastor Emeritas

Pastoral Message

The Rev. Dr. Michael Diaz, Senior Pastor



“Life is amazing. And then it’s awful. And then it’s amazing again. And in between the amazing and awful it’s ordinary and mundane and routine. Breathe in the amazing, hold on through the awful, and relax and exhale during the ordinary. That’s just living a heartbreaking, soul-healing, amazing, awful, ordinary life. And it’s breathtakingly beautiful.”—L.R. Knost

People of God, I eagerly await a return to the ordinary and mundane.

These last few weeks have been emotional, exciting, stressful, and life-giving for me. As exhausting as this past election season was, the post-election period seems to be only more aggravating. My family made a well-planned, cross-country move, but even the best planned journeys can be a little hectic. We’ve said farewell to dear friends in our previous faith community, and we have begun learning your names and faces in our new faith community of ELPC. And just when it feels like I have room to breathe and relax, then the seasons of Advent and Christmas arrive! Did I mention I eagerly await a return to the mundane and routine? You might be feeling the same...

A return to the ordinary (dare I say, normalcy!) would be nice, but it might be difficult to achieve in the coming weeks. In the liturgical calendar, we have transitioned from what is called “ordinary time” to Advent, a season of preparation for the coming of the Christ Child. In Advent, we reflect on how God meets us in our ordinary lives and how God transforms our most mundane moments into our most sacred moments. Such intentional reflection is meant to prepare us to receive anew the Christ Child. In Christ, God enters ordinary human life, and life itself is forever changed. So you see... liturgically-speaking, politically-speaking, spiritually-speaking, there is NOTHING ordinary about our current season. It truly is extraordinary.

Your hospitality these last few weeks has been extraordinary. Hearing some of your stories and your hopes and dreams have only reaffirmed this notion that in our everyday acts of loving our neighbor, God always shows up. Thank you for making Divine Love real in my life and in the life of my partner, Nino. Thank you for being the beloved community of God, one that follows Jesus and strives for justice. People of God, you are truly extraordinary.

As much as I would like to go back to some things being “ordinary” again, I also do not wish to miss out on God showing up where I least expect it. What about you? Are you prepared for God to show up in ways you never imagined before? Are you ready for God to make something truly extraordinary out of our mundane, everyday circumstances? As author L.R. Knost reminds us, life is like a rollercoaster. Breathe. Hold on. This amazing and awful, ordinary life is about to be even more beautiful as God shows up again in the extraordinary miracle of *Emmanuel*, God with us.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael Diaz".

Mission Matters

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

Support the Christmas Joy Offering

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. Yet, our congregation knows that our collective gifts through the Christmas Joy Offering celebrate the coming of Jesus Christ, the “perfect gift” from a gracious God.

Think back on those people in your life who have truly developed your faith. It may be a pastor or Christian educator, a youth minister or Sunday school teacher. Devoted and caring leaders have led many of us in the way of Christ. Church workers have shaped our faith, and they have been God’s gifts among us. As we celebrate Christ’s coming and think of the profound impact these individuals have had on us, the Christmas Joy Offering provides a way for us to offer a gift in response, especially for those church workers who find themselves in times where they need assistance to pay bills or receive life-saving medical treatment. Our gifts through the Christmas Joy Offering support these people who give so much of themselves to Christ’s church.



God also is calling new leaders for our Church and world through the ministry of Presbyterian-related schools and colleges equipping communities of color. Menaul School in Albuquerque, New Mexico; Presbyterian Pan American School in Kingsville, Texas; and Stillman College, a Historically Black College in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, are sustained through the generosity of Presbyterians, which means a brighter future and enhanced opportunities for those students to use their talents and skills to serve God, the Church, and the world. When you

give to the Christmas Joy Offering, you help sustain these promises and uplift our siblings in Christ by reducing their burdens and opening new paths of opportunity.

When we receive the Christmas Joy Offering on **Sunday, December 22**, may you give generously in thanksgiving to God for the most perfect gift of all, the gift of Jesus Christ.

Strengthen Your Finances with OHM

Are you wondering about your financial future? Are you considering homeownership as an option, but worried about affordability? Are you struggling to maintain financial discipline in light of the increased cost of living in our area? Is your annual family income around \$50,000 to \$80,000?

If you answered yes to any of these, you are not alone, and you don’t need to face these questions alone. For 16 years, ELPC and Open Hand Ministries (OHM) have worked together to create a community that seeks financial wellness for everyone—maybe even you.

To find out how OHM can help you reach your financial goals, call Wayne Younger at **412.924.1409** or email office@openhandpittsburgh.org.

Stewardship Campaign

The season of Advent is a time of hope and joyful anticipation of the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. We give presents, make donations, and volunteer our time off as a reflection of the gift of salvation that Christ’s coming has given to us. Will you consider a gift to ELPC this season?

It’s not too late to pledge your gifts in support of the mission and ministries of ELPC as part of our 2025 Stewardship Campaign. Your pledges help the stewards of ELPC’s finances prepare for the upcoming budget year so that we walk with confidence in the path that God has laid before us.

Stewardship pledge cards are available at the church, online, or by contacting our Rachelle Calfee at RachelleC@coh.net or **412.441.3800 x234**.



Homeownership Opportunity

Open Hand Ministries announced the availability of the cottage at 428 Ardary Street in Garfield. This small, three-bedroom, craftsman-style home has been remodeled with a new roof; hardwood floors; and new electrical, HVAC, and plumbing systems.

If you want more information about the home and also about your eligibility for affordable homeownership, please call Wayne Younger at **412.924.1409** or email office@openhandpittsburgh.org.

Winter Break

There will be no youth Sunday School or adult Church School classes on **Sundays, December 15, December 29, or January 5**. Classes for learners of all ages will resume on **Sunday, January 12**.

Nursery for Kids up to Age 3

Our Nursery is now staffed on Sundays, 8:30 am-12:30 pm. Children sing songs, hear stories, and engage in play to learn about God's love.

Children Age 4–Grade 3

Children are invited to *Sunday School: Sacred Stories for Kids* after the Moments with our Children in the Sanctuary (11:15 am). Using the Godly Play curriculum, kids hear, see, touch, and retell the sacred stories of our faith while asking "I wonder ..." questions and responding with art. Children also pray, sing, and share a simple snack.

Parents pick up their kids after worship in Room 206.

Tweens in Grades 4–6

Youth are invited to *Sunday School: Sacred Stories for Tweens* after the Moments with our Children in the Sanctuary (11:15 am). Tweens dig into Bible stories through games, conversations, crafts, drama, and teamwork to discover what these stories mean to them in today's world.

Parents pick up their kids after worship in Room 207.

Teens in Grades 7–12

On **December 1**, 9:45–10:45 am, high school youth are invited to join us for breakfast, prayer, and conversation in the Second Floor Parlor.

Journey with Scripture | Highland Room & Zoom

Facilitators: Rev. Henk Bossers and other class members

Join us as we relate both the Psalms and the liturgical calendar's Gospel of Mark with the "Heavenly Hosts." Our scriptures will expand and deepen our understanding of our "Reformed, Ever Reforming" legacy. Contact Sara Hackett at SaraH@coh.net for details.

Seekers | Garth Overlook Room & Zoom

Facilitator: Gwen Puza | gpuza9@gmail.com

December 1: Discussion on Religion and the 2024 Election

November brought an end to a contentious and polarizing election season, but while the election is over, the contention and polarization will continue—and maybe worsen. What is a Christian to do? This session will provide a preliminary look at the role religion played in the election, and provide us with an opportunity to process our reactions to the results of the election.

Daniel Aleshire served 12 years as a seminary professor, was on staff at the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) in the U.S. and Canada in 1990, and served as ATS executive director from 1998–2017 (ATS membership includes more than 280 Mainline, Evangelical, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic seminaries and theological schools.) Since retirement from ATS, he has been a member of the Board of Directors at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. His wife, Jo Ellen Aleshire, is a deacon at ELPC.

December 8: Re-Casting the Christ Story with Bishop Spong

Bishop John Shelby Spong served as a priest of the Episcopal Church for 21 years, and became known as a spokesperson for an open, scholarly, and inclusive Christianity. In this lecture presented at the Chautauqua Institute, he re-examines the Biblical concept of man's fall from perfection. He sees the audience as persons who are not fallen sinners, but who have not yet achieved the fullness of their humanity. He says that Jesus came "so that you might have life, and that you might have it abundantly."

December 22: The Core of Our Religious Traditions

Karen Armstrong is a British author and religious commentator who is known for her books on comparative religion. In this video presentation from Qatar, she states that "religion has a major contribution to make to a major task of our time... to build a global community where people of all persuasions can live together in harmony and respect."

Soul Food | Good Samaritan Room & Zoom

Facilitators: Rev. Joe Hajdu and other class members

New participants are always welcome! For more information, contact the Rev. Joe Hajdu at hajdu625@comcast.net.

December 1 & 8: Always a Guest

We will discuss chapters 21–24 of *Always a Guest* by Barbara Brown Taylor.

December 22: Christmas Reflections with the Gospel Narratives

Children, Youth, & Young Adult Ministries

Christmas Pageant Help Needed

We're looking for actors, sheep, stars, narrators, musicians, and set designers for our annual Christmas Pageant! Let Sara know if you want to help!

- Dress rehearsal is on **Saturday, December 14**, 9:30–11 am, for all involved.
- The Christmas Pageant will be held on **Sunday, December 15**. Kids should arrive by 9:30 am; the pageant begins at 10 am.
- Middle schoolers (grades 6–8), we need your help to be narrators! Practice will be on **Sunday, December 8**, 12:15–1 pm, for narrators only. We will run through the script and assign parts.
- High schoolers, we would love your help directing, designing the set, or playing music for the Pageant.

Club 116 on Wednesdays

Kids in grades 1–6 are invited to **club 116**, our midweek youth group ministry, on Wednesdays, 4:30–6:30 pm. We have Bible study, crafts, games in the gym, and dinner together!

This month, we will meet on **Wednesdays, December 4 & 11**. We will not meet on Wednesdays, December 18 & 25.

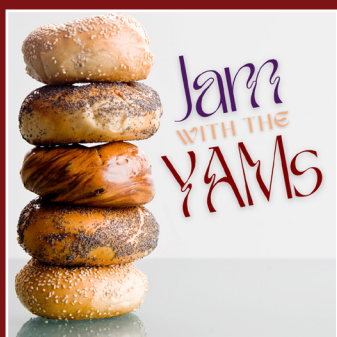
For more information, email Sara Hackett at SaraH@coh.net.

Youth Group on Thursdays

Students in grades 7–12 are welcome to join us for Youth Group on Thursdays, 4:30–7 pm. Dinner is served at 5 pm. We hang out, play games, and explore faith and prayer together!

This month, we will meet on **Thursdays, December 12 & 19**. We will not meet on Thursdays, December 5 & 26.

For more information, email Sara Hackett at SaraH@coh.net.



Jam with the YAMs

If you're 18–40 years old, join our members of our Young Adult Ministry (YAMs) after worship on **Sunday, December 15**, for pizza and bowling in ELPC's 1930s duck pin bowling alley. Old friends and new visitors are equally welcome to attend!

RSVP to Sara Hackett at SaraH@coh.net.



Advent Devotional

This Advent, ELPC's Faith Formation Board is excited to offer Sanctified Art's Advent devotional, *From Generation to Generation*. The stories, scriptures, and traditions of the Christmas season have been passed down to us throughout the generations. Many of us enter this season with a swell of memories and emotions as vast as the cultural and religious rituals this holiday holds.

In this daily devotional, we encourage you to pay attention to each of the characters in these familiar narratives and ask, "What did each person pass on or contribute? How did they either participate in God's liberation and love—or try to thwart God's justice? What can we learn from them and what is our role now? What will we pass on to the next generation?"

Written collaboratively by a team of artists, the devotional includes visual art, written reflections, poems, hymns, and journaling prompts. Day by day, they invite you to journey through the reflections and prompts in this devotional with wonder and curiosity for the ways God is speaking to you.

This Advent, may you remember that you belong—to a story etched into the wrinkles of time, to generations that have come before and will come after, to a love that won't let you go.

Pick up your devotional at ELPC or request a copy by emailing Jen King at JenK@coh.net.

Zoom Gathering on the Eve of the Inauguration

You are invited to “Wrestle with Our Hopes and Fears” in a community of faith on **Sunday, January 19**, 3–4 pm, on Zoom. This day is the eve, not only of the Inauguration of Donald Trump as President, but also Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

The Zoom gathering will be hosted by Presbyterian Women. You do not need to be Presbyterian or a woman to participate! We hope you will find comfort in these uncertain times.

Many thanks to all who participated in our impromptu Zoom gathering on Sunday, November 10, when we began to “Wrestle with Our Hopes and Fears.”

Email PW.ELPC@gmail.com for more information.

RCC Holiday Concert

The Renaissance City Choir will present A Very Ruby Holiday in concert on **Saturday, December 7**, 7 pm, at ELPC! From your favorite holiday standards to asking “Santa to Bring Me a Man,” this concert will bring the holiday fun and leave you with all the warm fuzzies.



Presbyterian Women Bible Study

Let Justice Roll Down: Water Justice

Monday, December 2 7–8:30 pm (Zoom Only)

Tuesday, December 3 10 am–12 pm (Hybrid)

Beginning with the creation stories in Genesis, scripture and human history teach us how water impacts life on Earth. Water is life. Lack of water is death. However, too much water, or polluted water, also brings death.



Is water a human right or a commodity to sell or pollute for profit? How can we assure access to water for everyone?

Our Tuesday Bible Study will be followed by a potluck lunch in the Fellowship Room. Bring a dish to share with the group; beverages will be provided.

Email PW.ELPC@gmail.com for more information and the Zoom link.

Do You Feel Called to Serve as a Deacon?

by Gretchen Chapman, ELPC Deacon

Would you like to deepen your connection to our radically inclusive church family? Do you feel called to serve in a new way? I encourage you to consider prayerfully whether you would like to serve as a Deacon. I have been blessed to join the Board of Deacons this year, and consequently, I have forged friendships with people I previously did not know well, learned more about how the church operates and the many ministries it provides, and worked to serve others.

Deacons take care of the church community through a number of ministries. We prepare the communion elements before worship. Each week, one of us serves as Deacon on Duty, ready to help in whatever way might be needed during worship, such as guiding a visitor, comforting a worshiper who is upset, or cleaning up a spill. Recently, the Deacons have expanded our homebound ministry so that church members and friends who cannot come to church in person receive regular cards and visits. A couple of times per year we get to serve a meal at the Northside Community Ministries. Deacons also oversee several engaging events for the whole congregation, including:

- **The Giving Tree** | An opportunity to give gifts to Pittsburgh children
- **The Blue Christmas Service** | A worship service for those who find the holiday season painful in some ways
- **The International Meal** | A celebration of the many cultural traditions in our faith family

Our monthly hybrid meetings on the second Tuesday of each month, 7 pm, are full of laughter and personal sharing.

If you'd like to be considered, guidelines and nomination forms are available in the church mailroom, by scanning the QR code, or online at tiny.cc/elpc-nominations.



LGBTQIA+ Ministry

Wil Forrest, Coordinator of LGBTQ Ministry

Spiritual Gathering

All are invited to attend our LGBTQIA+ Ministry's next Spiritual Gathering on **Sunday, December 15**, 12:30 pm. Join us to share lunch and conversation. Allies and LGBTQIA+ folks alike are welcome!

Questions? Please contact Wil Forrest at wil@coh.net or **412.441.3800 x218**. A Zoom option will be offered only if expressed need is shared with Wil prior to the Friday before the gathering.



God Created You. God Loves You. Be Yourself.

Amen to Action: A Great Success!

A round of applause goes out to the ELPC volunteers that participated in Amen to Action on Saturday, November 2. Along with about 250 volunteers from other area churches, we packed 75,000 macaroni and cheese meals, which will be distributed by the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank to our neighbors who are experiencing food shortages.

Thanks to all those who participated, including: Carolyn Bigbee, Bill & Lynn Buchanan, Gretchen Chapman, Carla Deppernan, Bob & Carole Forloines, Sara Hackett, Debbie Harrell, Caroline Hough, Cathleen Malmstrom, Carla Mercado, Hannah Moon, Sandy Plumbo, Cheryl Rhodes, Paul Self, Allison & Darrah Seidel, Judy Shannon, Michael Sudar, Tiffany Sudar, Beth Urbaitis, and Nancy Wright.



ELPC People

If you have news to share, contact Jen King at JenniferK@coh.net or 412.441.3800 x222.

Prayers

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

- Ebony Moorefield's husband, Sami Yousef Charbel
- Herma Stewart's sister Edris Stewart
- Doris Dick's cousin Eileen Barron's husband Joe Barron

Updates from the Chapel Market

The Chapel Market is a free clothing store for our neighbors. It's located in the South Whitfield Street Chapel and it's open every Thursday, 10 am–12 pm, and the first and third Tuesday of each month, 5–7 pm.

We depend on generous donations from our congregation to stock our shelves. We are in need of (new or gently used) men's sweaters and sweatshirts, pants, socks, and underwear. We also need children's fall/winter clothes. And, shoppers are always in need of toiletry items, including soap, body wash, shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrushes, lotion, toilet paper, etc.

Please leave your fall/winter clothing donations in the collection boxes inside the Highland Avenue entrance any time the Church is open. Sorry, we do not have space to store spring/summer clothing at this time.

Also, if you'd like to volunteer to work in the Chapel Market, contact anyone on the Neighbors Committee or email Gerald McClendon at GeraldM@coh.net.

“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.”

‘Tis the Season of Giving

ELPC’s Deacons are once again hosting our annual Giving Tree! Browse and select requested gifts online at tiny.cc/elpc-giving-tree. You also may choose to make a donation to the Giving Tree. We suggest \$25 (though any amount is welcome). These donations are used to purchase gift cards.



Please do not wrap gifts. Instead, bring them in a gift bag with a string or ribbon, and a label that includes your name, the item, and the code. Gifts can be dropped off at the welcome desk.

Those making a financial donation can do so at elpc.church/donate (click the green button) or via check. Please indicate the donation is for “The Giving Tree.”

Deacons will be available to help with selecting gifts on **Sunday, December 1**. All gifts and donations are due back to ELPC by **Sunday, December 8**.

Contact Todd Hoffman at waltonhoffy@gmail.com or Pastor Patrice at PatriceFS@coh.net if you have any questions.

Christmas in East Liberty

Cathedral Concerts return with Christmas in East Liberty, on **Friday, December 13**, 7:30 pm. This highly anticipated concert is an East Liberty tradition and will feature holiday favorites. Join us live in the Sanctuary or online on YouTube or Facebook.

The concert is free, but a freewill offering will be accepted.



Photo by Kevin King

St. Olaf Choir to Perform at ELPC

The St. Olaf Choir will perform in the ELPC Sanctuary on **Sunday, February 9**, 7:30 pm. The choir is hailed as one of the nation's premier cappella ensembles and is renowned for its artistry and beauty of sound.



This is a ticketed event and will not be livestreamed. Discounted tickets are available for ELPC members and friends. Contact Dr. Ed Moore at EdM@coh.net.