

## Weekly Worship Schedule

**Journey Worship Service**  
Sundays | 8:45 am

**Sanctuary Worship Service**  
Sundays | 11 am

**Taizé Prayer Service**  
Wednesdays | 7 pm

## Hear the Christmas Story in Worship

Join us for our annual, special retelling of the Christmas story on **Sunday, December 21**, as part of our Sanctuary service at 11 am. The children and youth of our church will help us imagine the dreams of those who were there at Jesus's birth, while also sharing their own dreams this Christmas.

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

All kids are invited to participate! See details on page 5. There will be a dress rehearsal on **Saturday, December 20**, 9:30 am.



## 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.



To offer comfort and strength, ELPC's Board of Deacons will host our annual Blue Christmas service on **Friday, December 19**, 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.

Everyone is welcome to join us for a meditative time of prayer, reflection, and singing.

## Celebrate the Birth of Christ at ELPC



The seasons of Advent and Christmas provide a time of joy and celebration. Join us for our services on **Christmas Eve, Wednesday, 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

## Building Closures

ELPC will be closed on:

- Thursday, December 25
- Friday, December 26
- Wednesday, December 31
- Thursday, January 1



**East Liberty  
Presbyterian Church**

www.ELPC.church

info@coh.net | 412.441.3800

### Staff Leadership

**Rev. Dr. Michael A. Diaz**

*Senior Pastor and Head of Staff*  
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**Rev. Sarah Robbins**

*Covenant Pastor for Connection and Care*  
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**Rev. BJ Woodworth**

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*Administrative Assistant to Worship  
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## Pastoral Message

*The Rev. Dr. Michael A. Diaz, Senior Pastor*



People of God,

As we enter this holy season of Advent, we are invited to reclaim something sacred and often forgotten: **the will to dream**. At a time when fear, division, and exhaustion tug at our spirits, our God-given capacity to imagine a world beyond what we see is needed more than ever. Following what Walter Brueggemann calls prophetic imagination, this month we are practicing holy courage to envision what could be, even when the present feels overwhelming.

Isaiah 2:5 urges, "Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord." This is not escapism. It is spiritual resistance. Isaiah paints a breathtaking picture of people beating swords into plowshares and learning God's ways as they journey on a new path together. It's the bold work of confronting despair and choosing to hope anyway.

This is the heart of our Advent journey at ELPC. From Isaiah's dream to Mary's song, from shepherds startled awake by good news to Joseph discerning next steps in the night, Scripture reveals that God's future emerges through ordinary people who open themselves to the possibility of something new.

This December, I invite you to dream again and to dream boldly. Dream of a faith community where connection grows deeper, where justice is embodied, and where compassion becomes our daily rhythm. Dream of a world where peace is not the absence of noise but the presence of dignity. Dream of love becoming real among us in our shared life and the ministry we nurture side by side.

May this season broaden our perspectives, soften our hearts, and stir our imaginations. And may we journey together toward the Light of Christ that is already dawning.

Blessings,

## 2026 Pledges Update

As of November 26, we have received **160 pledges** totaling **\$555,787**. Help us reach our goal of 226 pledges totaling \$700,000 by making your pledge today!

Submit your pledge online at [ELPC.church/pledge](http://ELPC.church/pledge).

Questions? Contact Rachelle Calfee at **412.441.3800 x234** or [RachelleC@coh.net](mailto:RachelleC@coh.net).



**GROUND & GROWING**



## Christmas Joy Offering on December 21

For those of us who gather in Advent expectation, we remember that the only perfect gift ever given is Jesus Christ. Searching for the “perfect gift” for loved ones can be stressful, but our congregation knows that our collective gifts to the Christmas Joy Offering celebrate God’s perfect generosity.

Think of those who helped form your faith—a pastor, youth leader, or Sunday school teacher. These devoted leaders have shaped our journeys and embodied God’s gifts among us. The Christmas Joy Offering allows us to respond with gratitude, supporting current and former church workers who may need help paying bills or accessing essential medical care. Our gifts lift up those who have given so much to Christ’s church.

On **Sunday, December 21**, we will take up a special Christmas Joy offering to help retired and former church workers in the Presbyterian Church (USA). When you give to the Christmas Joy Offering, you help reduce burdens, open doors, and reflect the generosity of a God whose perfect gift came to us in Jesus Christ.

## End of Year Giving Invitation

As this year draws to a close, we give thanks for the many ways God has moved through our ELPC family. We have welcomed new faces in worship, deepened our commitments to justice and compassion, and strengthened ministries that bring hope to our neighbors. Your generosity makes this possible.

As we look toward the year ahead, we invite you to consider a special end-of-year gift to support ELPC’s mission. Your giving sustains worship that inspires, community that cares, and formation that transforms. It also fuels the practical work of love that reaches far beyond our walls. This includes our commitments to community partners who provide affordable housing for families with children, support neighbors experiencing homelessness and hunger, and sustain recovery groups meeting in East Liberty. These partnerships are a vital expression of who we are as a church grounded in community and overflowing with love.

Every gift—especially those above and beyond your regular giving—helps ensure that ELPC can meet these commitments with integrity and continue to be a beacon of justice, welcome, and healing in our community.

If you’ve already pledged for 2026, thank you. If you are able to make an additional year-end gift this month, your generosity strengthens our shared ministry for the year ahead. Visit [ELPC.church/donate](https://elpc.church/donate) to make a gift online or mail your gift to the church.

## Session News

In November, Session celebrated Pastor Michael’s one-year anniversary as Senior Pastor and began discussing the 2026 annual budget. The budget will be finalized after assessing the impact of our Stewardship Campaign.

## ’Tis the Season of Giving

It’s that time of year again for the Deacons annual Giving Tree Ministry. This is an excellent opportunity to assist families this Christmas season and provide children with gifts!

ELPC members, you have always been extremely generous supporting this important ministry. Sign up at [tiny.cc/elpc-giving-tree](https://tiny.cc/elpc-giving-tree) for specific gift requests and to make financial donations to assist with the purchase of retail gift cards.



Gifts should be dropped off at the church no later than **Sunday, December 7**.

Monetary donations can be made online at [ELPC.church/donate](https://elpc.church/donate), and be sure to include “For Giving Tree” in the notation.

## Advent Devotional: The Will to Dream

This Advent and Christmas, we will dream together in worship and around kitchen tables. In this time of upheaval, we find divisions stretch far and wide. Community feels strained, and connection is harder to come by. Hearts are weary, and souls are unsettled, and people of all perspectives are searching—not just for answers, but for understanding, healing, and hope. This ache is not weakness; it is a holy longing—a sacred desire for a world made whole. From this longing comes the will to dream—a persistent courage to imagine, resist, and rebuild a better world.



Join us this Advent and Christmas as we turn to the wisdom of the prophets, lament systems that value power over people, and dream of what could be.

Pick up your Advent Devotional at ELPC or email [JenK@coh.net](mailto:JenK@coh.net) to have one mailed to you. The weekly readings, reflections, and coloring pages connect and build with each week's worship.

Families with kids can pick up an Advent Calendar that contains all the supplies you'll need for easy ways to dream together as you practice *Hope, Joy, Peace, and Love* this Advent season.

## Christian Education

### Journey with Scripture | Highland Room & Zoom

*Facilitators: Rev. Henk Bossers and other class members | SaraH@coh.net*

Join us to read together various Scripture readings, whether from the lectionary or our pastor's choosing. These readings span across the entire Bible. The class uses a variety of methods of engaging the Scripture texts and is conversational in nature. Prior knowledge of the Scriptures is not necessary for participation.

### Seekers | Garth Overlook Room & Zoom

*Facilitator: Gwen Puza | gpuza9@gmail.com*

#### **December 7: The plight of Christians in Syria and in other parts of the Middle East**

Dalel Khalil will be with us to discuss the plight of Orthodox Christians in Syria and what the future means under the new Syrian government. Dalel Khalil is a Syrian-American Orthodox Christian, author and co owner of Khalil's Middle Eastern Restaurant on Baum Blvd.

#### **December 14: Incarnation: When God Becomes Small**

Pastor Michael much of Christian theology celebrates the vastness and omnipotence of God, but the infancy narratives reveal a quieter truth: God becomes small. What if the spiritual life is not about becoming big or powerful but becoming small enough to love and be loved? What if God's power is revealed not in magnificence but in tenderness?

#### **December 21: Marcus Borg on Jesus in the 1st and the 21st Centuries**

In this video, Marcus Borg will discuss how the spiritual and cultural issues of the 1st century shaped Jesus and his message, and how we should respond to his message as we live in today's world. He makes the distinctions between the "pre-Easter Jesus" and the "post-Easter Jesus."

Marcus Borg was an American New Testament scholar and theologian, and was among the most widely known and influential voices in Liberal Christianity. Borg was a fellow of the Jesus Seminar and a major figure in historical Jesus scholarship.

### Soul Food | Good Samaritan Room & Zoom

*Facilitators: Rev. Joe Hajdu and other class members | hajdu625@comcast.net*

#### **December 7, 14, & 21: Season's Greetings**

We will conclude our discussion of *Season's Greetings* by Ruth Boling, our book for Advent and Christmas.

## Taking a Break for the Holidays

There will be no adult Church School classes on **Sundays, December 28** or **January 4**. Classes for learners of all ages will resume their regular schedule on **Sunday, January 11**.

# Children & Youth Ministry

Sara Hackett, Director of Christian Education & Youth Ministry

## Youth Group

Youth in grades 7–12 gather together each week for dinner, games, God talk, community, laughter, prayer, and doing good. We would love to have you join us on Thursdays, 4:30–7 pm!

Register online at [ELPC.church](http://ELPC.church). We will meet at ELPC on December 4 & 11, and at Sixth Presbyterian Church on December 18. There will be no Youth Group on December 25 or January 1.

## Gift Making for Tweens

On **Saturday, December 13**, 1–3 pm, tweens in grades 3–6 are invited to come and make a variety of Christmas gifts to give to family and neighbors.

## Kids Needed to Help Tell the Christmas Story

We're looking for actors, sheep, stars, narrators, musicians, and set designers for our annual Christmas Pageant! Sign up online or by emailing [SaraH@coh.net](mailto:SaraH@coh.net).

- Dress rehearsal is on **Saturday, December 20**, 9:30–11 am, for all involved.
- The Christmas Pageant will be held on **Sunday, December 21**, during our Sanctuary worship service. Kids should arrive by 10:30 am.
- **Kids up to grade 5** will be sheep, stars, Mary, Joseph, angels, the donkey and more. Parts will be assigned at practice on December 20.
- **Middle schoolers** (grades 6–8), we need your help to be narrators! There will be a narrators-only practice on **Sunday, December 14**, 9:45–10:45 am. 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.



## Children & Families

### Open Gym with Coffee & Donuts

Parents and kids are welcome to hang out, drink coffee or juice, eat a donut, and play in the Gym on **Sunday, December 7**, 9:45–10:45 am.



We meet on the first Sunday of every month. If you want to meet other families or just love basketball or scooters, this is for you! This time also is perfect for parents of older teens (grades 7–12) who have Sunday School at the same time.

### Hot Chocolate Reception

Everyone is invited to a Hot Chocolate Reception following our Christmas Pageant on **Sunday, December 21**, 12 pm.



The Children and Families Ministry team hosts monthly family events to foster a caring community of families at ELPC, where kids and adults feel loved and empowered to explore their faith. RSVPs are appreciated, but not required.

## Impactful Advocacy

We learned at our recent Adult Education presentation that individualized calls and emails to legislators are more impactful than form letters and emails. The Environmental Team of the Justice Committee will offer two info sessions on Zoom. The first will be held the evening of **Monday, January 12**, and the second will be held the morning of **Wednesday, January 14**.

You will receive examples, tips and tools. We ask you to bring an issue or cause that's important to you.

If you are interested in participating, but did not attend our October presentation, you can request the recording link. Contact Nancy Heastings at [n.heastings@comcast.net](mailto:n.heastings@comcast.net) for more information or to register.

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## Environmental Team's New Book Study

The Environmental Team of the Justice Committee is reading *Shade: the Promise of a Forgotten Natural Resource* by Sam Bloch. Read along and join us for a discussion on **Thursday, January 22**, 7 pm, on Zoom.

In his new book, environmental journalist Sam Bloch encourages us to look to the past for solutions to our ever-warming urban areas as climate change creates heat waves that are more frequent, hotter and longer lasting. Bloch's call for more shade in urban areas, with more trees in parks and residential areas and new ways to design public areas and buildings, comes as policy makers grapple with a growing crisis in heat-related illness and death.

For further information and the Zoom link, contact Nancy Heastings at [n.heastings@comcast.net](mailto:n.heastings@comcast.net).

## Pray Always in All Ways: Classes & Retreat

Have you ever wondered what prayer is or if you even believe in prayer? Have you ever longed to pray more but struggled to know how? Whether you feel like a novice or practiced expert, we all need to practice prayer. There is no right or wrong way to pray, nor is there no one starting point or a finish line. There is only the continual showing up to practice prayer and allowing our deepest longings for God, others and the world to emerge.



Together, we will talk about our struggles and hopes with prayer and explore a wide variety of prayer forms, including body prayer, prayer beads, icons, silent, written fixed-hour prayer and prayer as simple awareness in life. It will be playful, inspiring, and interactive with lots of time to practice together.

### There are two ways you can participate:

- Weekly Gatherings on Wednesdays, January 21 & 28, and February 4 & 11, 5:30–7 pm  
Register for the classes at [tinyurl.com/PrayAlwaysClasses2026](https://tinyurl.com/PrayAlwaysClasses2026).
- Weekend Retreat, Friday–Sunday, January 23–25  
Register for the retreat at [tinyurl.com/PrayAlwaysRetreat2026](https://tinyurl.com/PrayAlwaysRetreat2026).

### Cost Options:

- \$100 | One Night: Friday–Saturday or Saturday–Sunday with Private Room & Common Bath
- \$125 | One Night: Friday–Saturday or Saturday–Sunday with Private Room & Bath
- \$150 | Two Nights Friday–Sunday with Private Room & Common Bath
- \$175 | Two Nights Friday–Sunday with Private Room & Bath
- \$50 | Saturday Day

*"Prayer is easy only for beginners and for those who are already Saints. During all the long years in between, it is difficult. Why? Because prayer has the same inner dynamics as love, and love is sweet only in its initial stage, when we first fall in love, and again in its final, mature stage. In between, love is hard work, dogged fidelity, and needs willful commitment beyond what is normally provided by our emotions and our imagination. It's when I say, "I don't know how to love," and "I don't know how to pray," that I first begin to understand what love and prayer actually are."—Ronald Rolheiser*

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## Chapel Market's Winter Donation Requests

The Chapel Market is stocking up on winter clothes for our neighbors in need. From now until Thanksgiving, please consider donating clean, new or gently-used winter coats for toddlers to adults. They also need full-sized toiletry items. Leave donations in the Highland Lobby.

# Presbyterian Women Bible Study

**Finding Resilience, Joy, and Our Identity in Jesus Christ:  
The Prodigal Child, the Eldest Child, and the Devoted Parent**  
**Monday, December 1** 7–8:30 pm (Online only)  
**Tuesday, December 2** 10 am–12 pm (Hybrid)



With a study of the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), we turn our attention to JOY—the profound joy of the lost being found. When one of God’s children returns to the community of the faithful, God is the first to welcome the lost with open arms of forgiveness, embrace, and joy. This familiar Bible story includes themes of repentance and forgiveness. The story also addresses who is worthy of God’s embrace and the role of grace. As followers of Christ, how can we choose joy and extend God’s embrace to all?

Tuesday morning Bible study will meet online and in the Fellowship Room. The in-person study will be followed by a potluck lunch. Please bring a dish to share; beverages will be provided.

Email [PW.ELPC@gmail.com](mailto:PW.ELPC@gmail.com) for more information and the Zoom link.

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## Pittsburgh Pride Choir Holiday Concert



Join Pittsburgh Pride Choir for an evening filled with soaring holiday songs, festive dancing, and just the right touch of tinsel at their holiday concert, *A Not So Silent Night*. More than 120 voices strong, the Pittsburgh Pride Choir brings the magic of the season to

life on **Saturday, December 6**, 7:30 pm, in the ELPC Sanctuary and online. Visit [pittsburghpridechoir.org](http://pittsburghpridechoir.org) for tickets and more info.

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## LGBTQIA+ Ministry

Wil Forrest, Coordinator of LGBTQ Ministry



### Our Next Spiritual Gathering

Please join us at our next Spiritual Gathering on **Sunday, December 14**, 12:30 pm, to share conversation and lunch. Allies and LGBTQIA+ folks alike welcomed.

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.**

## ELPC People

If you have news to share, contact Jen King at [JenK@coh.net](mailto:JenK@coh.net) or 412.441.3800 x222.

### Thanks

Please join us in welcoming our new members and friends, who joined our faith family this November:

- Members: Tommy Caruso, Mackenzie Hobson, Doug & Linda McCullough, Sophia Nam, Jill Rabideau, and Kim Reyes
- Friends: Andrew Freitas, Finn Hobson, Scott Peterman, and Liz Tafel

### Prayers

We offer our prayers of comfort to the family and friends of Ida over the passing of her husband at the end of October.

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## Young Adult Happy Hour Continues

Our next Young Adult Happy Hour takes place on **Monday, December 15**, 6–7:30 pm, at Andrea Devries home in Highland Park. Stop by for appetizers and drinks (both alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks are available). And plan on joining us on the third Monday of every month!

Details and RSVPs via evite. Contact Sara Hackett at [SaraH@coh.net](mailto:SaraH@coh.net) for more information.

*Our Young Adult Ministry welcomes all adults post-high school through their 20s and 30s. We are a community of students, professionals, married, single, partnered, with or without children—and from different races, sexual orientations, gender identities, abilities, backgrounds, and with varied beliefs. We join together to seek to better understand, to worship, and to serve the Holy. ALL people and questions are welcome. Seriously!*

*“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.”*

## It’s Christmas in East Liberty

Our *Cathedral Concerts* series returns with the year’s most anticipated concert, ***Christmas in East Liberty***, on **Friday, December 13, 7:30 pm!**

This annual, East Liberty tradition will feature holiday favorites, along with performances by The Brass Roots with conductor Daniel Curtis, the ELPC Chancel Choir under the direction of Dr. Edward Alan Moore, guest organist Ethan LaPlaca, saxophonist Mike Tomaro, and narrator Jim Cunningham. The concert also will include a new setting of *It’s the Most Wonderful Time of the Year* by Mike Tomaro.

Join us in the Sanctuary or on YouTube or Facebook. The concert is free and open to all, so bring your family and friends! A freewill offering will be received.



## We the Messiah – A Hip Hop Remix of Handel’s Messiah

Join Pastor Michael and other Pittsburgh faith leaders as they help narrate the production of ***We the Messiah***, a Hip Hop remix and social justice reimagining of Handel’s *Messiah*. This **theatrical concert** is a crescendo call for collective action and an instrumental invitation to awaken the Messiah that lives in us all. ELPC community members contributed to the project earlier this fall through activism conversations that helped shape the community-voices component of the production.

Performances are on **Friday, December 19, 7:30 pm**, and **Saturday, December 20, 3 pm & 7:30 pm**. Tickets are free, but please register at [kelly-strayhorn.org](http://kelly-strayhorn.org).

