



REACHING OUT

NEWSLETTER OF EAST LIBERTY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

FEBRUARY 2026 | ISSUE ONE

 **East Liberty
Presbyterian Church**
www.ELPC.church

116 South Highland Ave
Pittsburgh, PA 15206 

www.ELPC.church



@EastLibertyPresbyterian

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because the Spirit has anointed me to bring good news...
(Luke 4:18)

PASTORAL NOTE

Rev. Dr. Michael Diaz

How are you feeling these days? Stressed? Worried? Hopeless? It's hard to deny how our world is saturated with breaking news, bad news, half-truths, and endless commentary competing for our attention. It can feel disorienting, exhausting, and even soul-numbing.

In February, we are making space for a different rhythm. After lifting our voices and singing our hearts through hymns and songs that honor Black History Month, we will turn our gaze towards Lent and ask a simple question: What is the good news that still holds us? Beginning

on Ash Wednesday, Feb 18, we will enter Lent together with a new worship series called *Tell Me Something Good: Grounding Ourselves in the Good News This Lent.*



Throughout this season, we will be grounding ourselves in the life and ministry of Jesus. Together we will explore radical welcome, love of neighbor, care for the vulnerable, nourishment for the hungry, and nonviolence in the face of injustice. These are not abstract ideas but the heartbeat of Jesus' public ministry and the steady witness of the kingdom of God breaking into the world.

This Lent is not about adding more to your plate or striving for spiritual perfection. It is about rooting ourselves in a faith that tells the truth and still dares to hope. It's about a faith that listens closely and speaks good news not only with words, but with our very lives.

So, if you are curious, weary, hopeful, skeptical, or somewhere in between, there is room for you in this season. I hope you'll join us for worship, prayer, weekly devotionals, and opportunities for reflection as we listen for and live out the good news.

*In Christ,
Pastor Michael*

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ASH WEDNESDAY

A season for reflection, repentance, and remembering the good news that holds us, Lent begins on **Ash Wednesday, Feb 18**. We will have a reflective service of word and prayer in the Chapel at 12:00 pm, followed by an evening service in the Sanctuary at 7:00 pm. Both services will include the imposition of ashes, a sacred reminder that even in our vulnerability, God's grace meets us with mercy and love.

SESSION NEWS

In addition to approving the 2026 annual budget at January's meeting, Session authorized the creation of an ad hoc Communications Team and a taskforce to adopt an anti-racism policy.

PEOPLE NEWS

Congratulations to Emily Snoek and Jason Griess on the birth of their daughter, Marlowe June Snoek Griess, on Jan 20.

CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

Session scheduled the 2025 annual *Congregational Meeting* to take place on Sunday, Feb 22 at 12:15 pm following our Sanctuary worship service. All official members of the church are invited to participate and vote for new candidates for Elder and Deacon for this next year. The meeting will be held in the Social Hall. Refreshments will be served.



TAIZÉ: *Prayerful Song
& Quiet Meditation*
Wednesdays, 7 pm
Chapel

JOURNEY WORSHIP
Sundays, 8:45 am
Chapel

SANCTUARY WORSHIP
Sundays, 11 am
Sanctuary

LENTEN SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

During Lent the ELPC Spiritual Life Ministry will be offering 3 different spiritual pathways to communally engage in our Lenten theme of: **Grounding Ourselves in the Good News of Lent.**

We will ground ourselves in Jesus' life and ministry, exploring radical welcome, love for neighbor, care for the vulnerable, and nonviolence in the face of injustice. We will also engage in ancient practices that root us deeper in Christ and create space for substantive change - *Lectio Divina* and *Visio Divina*.

Lectio Divina, Latin for "divine reading" is rooted in the historic Benedictine tradition. It is the slow, meditative reading of a Scripture passage that focuses on prayerfully listening and responding to God's word. The four movements are:

- **Lectio:** Read the text slowly and prayerfully, listening for a word or phrase that captures your attention.
- **Meditatio:** stopping, resting, repeating the word or phrase to yourself.
- **Oratio:** prayerfully dialogue and wonder with God how this word affects you.
- **Contemplatio:** rest in God's presence.

Visio Divina, Latin for "divine seeing," is a method of meditation, reflection, and prayer through a process of intentional seeing. *Visio Divina* extends *Lectio Divina* using visual imagery. If you are curious about these practices and want to ground your Lent in a regular communal practice, join us at one of the following times beginning Feb 22:

- **Journey with Scripture** (*Sundays at 9:45-10:45 am*)
- **Taizé** (*Wednesdays at 7 pm*)
- **Zoom Morning Contemplative Prayer** (*Mondays from 7:30-8 am*)
- **Praying with Art for Families and Tweens** (*Wednesdays from 5-7 pm*)

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION CLASSES

JOURNEY WITH SCRIPTURE

Highland Room & Zoom

Facilitators: Rev. Henk Bossers and other class members (SaraH@cob.net)

Join Pastor BJ and Henk Bossers as we practice both *Visio* and *Lectio Divina* and share together how Spirit is speaking to us through scripture for worship that week as well as the art.

SOUL FOOD

Good Samaritan Room & Zoom

Facilitators: Rev. Joe Hajdu and other class members (hajdu625@comcast.net)

Feb 1, 8, and 22: Discussion of *So You Want to Talk About Race* by Ijeoma Oluo

Feb 15: In recognition of Black History Month we will join with the Seekers in our classroom to hear a presentation from four members of our Facing Systemic Racism Committee.

SEEKERS

Garth Overlook Room & Zoom

Facilitator: Gwen Puza (gpuza9@gmail.com)

Feb 1: Video by Ijeoma Oluo

Ijeoma is a writer, speaker and the author of the #1 New York Times bestseller of *So You Want to Talk About Race*. It is a practical guide to talking about race.

Feb 8: African Spirituality

This interesting video covers the basic tenets of African spirituality, that all African tribes have in common. Dalian Adofo is an Educationist, published author, information architect and a spiritual initiate in the Yoruba IFA faith.

Feb 15: Does Erasure Matter?

Seekers will join Soul Food in the Samaritan Room for a combined class. Members of the ELPC Facing Systemic Racism Committee will discuss the national efforts made in this past year to control access to programs, topics, and displays that promote Black History and/or to address systemic racism. How do we preserve the accurate story of Black history in America as well as programs designed to address racism?

Feb 22: Black Government Girl

ELPC member Beverly Harris-Schenz will present her book *Mary Martin: Black Government Girl*. This book chronicles her mother's journey in 1942 from her small town in southern Illinois to Washington, DC. She, like 100,000 other African-Americans, seeks a better life in the nation's wartime capital. Despite Jim Crow laws and segregation, she succeeds in achieving her goals.

Children & Youth Ministries



PRAYING WITH ART (*Visio Divina*) FOR FAMILIES & TWEENS

On Wednesday evenings in Lent from 5-7 pm, families and tweens are invited share dinner, make art, and explore different ways of praying this Lent. Activities will follow the themes in our Lenten worship and devotional series *Tell Me Something Good*. Families of any age are welcome to come and tweens in 3rd-6th grade can join with or without a parent. Check out what art we are making, what's for dinner, and our evening schedule on the church's online calendar. RSVP to Sara Hackett (SaraH@coh.net).

OPEN GYM AND COFFEE & DONUTS

Parents and kids are welcome to hang out, drink coffee or juice, eat a donut, and play in the gym on the first Sunday of every month (Feb 1) from 9:45-10:45 am. If you want to meet other families – this is for you!

Teen Sunday School for 7th-12th grade students is happening on Sunday, Feb 1 and 15 at 9:45 am in the Second Floor Parlor.

Sunday School for kids age 4-6th grade happens every Sunday during 11 am worship.

VALENTINE COOKIES FOR DOGS

Children, youth, and families are baking and decorating dog treats in the Good Samaritan Room from 12–2 pm on Sunday, Feb 15. We'll be making treats for Ellie's Pet Pantry, a program at Humane Animal Rescue. Pups and their humans will be thrilled to receive the homemade treats and the love we will put into them! This event is open to any age child with a parent/adult and youth in grades 4-12 may attend on their own. Lunch from Chipotle will be

THURSDAY NIGHT YOUTH GROUP

From 4:30-7 pm, 7th-12th grade students, together with youth from Sixth Presbyterian Church, will share dinner, pray, play, and explore faith through service projects, arts and crafts, conversations, silly games, and whatever else we dream up!

- Feb 5: Ice Skating at Schenley Rink. Youth group starts at 4:30 with dinner at ELPC before heading to Schenley at 6 pm. We will return to ELPC for pick up at 8:30 pm.
- Feb 12: Youth Group at ELPC
- Feb 19: Youth Group at ELPC
- Feb 26: Youth Group at Sixth Presbyterian Church

CONFIRMATION CLASS

On Sunday, Feb 22 from 12:15-2:30 pm, the confirmation class will have lunch, learn about the church and what it means to be Presbyterian, including ... What sacraments Presbyterians celebrate. What type of government Presbyterians use to discern God's call for the church. The questions people are asked in worship when they become members.

TWEEN RETREAT: Feb 28-March 1 at Crestfield

4th through 6th graders can join us for this single night retreat at Crestfield Camp and Conference Center with kids from Presbyterian Churches all around the city. Crafts, worship, games, climbing the rock wall, music, silliness and thoughtful questions always fill these retreats. We will meet at ELPC at 8 am on Saturday morning and return Sunday at noon. Cost of the retreat is \$100 and scholarship money is available. Parents interested in joining the fun by chaperoning should contact Sara Hackett (SaraH@coh.net).

VACATION CHURCH SCHOOL 2026

Vacation Church School at ELPC will be held Monday–Friday, June 22–26 from 9 am–3 pm for children in pre-K (age 4 and potty-trained) through grade 5 (completed). Our theme this summer is Kids Connect, where children wake up those

neurons, get those synapses flowing, and jump on the wavelength of God’s love!

Each day includes worship and drama, Bible study, art and science explorations, brain-building challenges, and active games.

Teen and adult volunteers are needed too! Save the date. ELPC families are encouraged to register EARLY as registration filled up last year in early April. Email SaraH@coh.net for an early registration link.



HOPE ACADEMY SPRING REGISTRATION IS NOW OPEN

This is a great time to encourage the young people in your life to check out the Hope Academy program schedule. Private lessons are available in violin, viola, piano, and voice. Classes open for PBT Dance, Youth Capoeira with Akin Lowman, Ukulele, String and Sound Explorers from BT Studios, Hip Hop Orchestra by Guardians of Sound (FREE), Sing and Dance with Shana Simmons and Joshua Rouse (FREE), Sunday Musikgarten with Carmen Blanco and MORE! Scan this QR code for more info.



SPONSOR CHANCEL FLOWERS

ELPC’s Worship, Music and Arts Committee is partnering with Jim Ludwig’s Blumengarten Florist to provide opportunities for congregants to sponsor floral arrangements for the chancel. For the price of \$260, individuals, groups, and families can sponsor two lush arrangements of fresh, seasonal flowers to memorialize or honor loved ones, celebrate special occasions, or mark liturgical milestones.

Sponsors will be recognized for their contributions via in social media posts, the bulletin, worship service slides, and Sunday announcements.

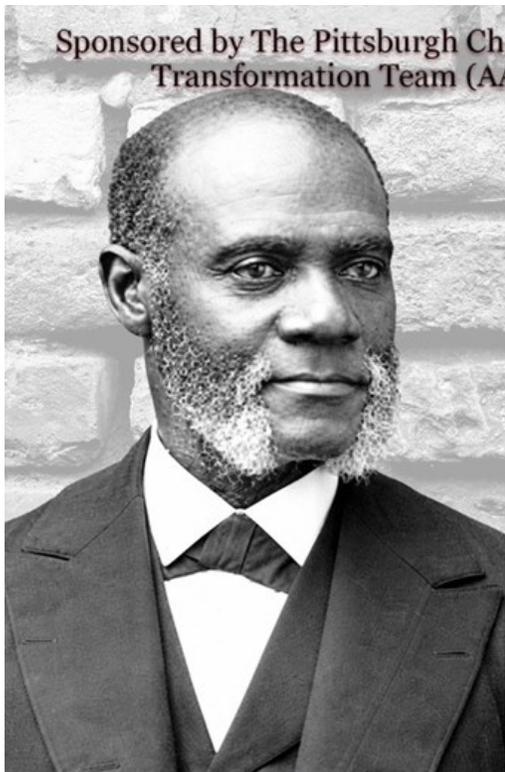
Reserve your special Sunday online by visiting tiny.cc/SundayFlowers; or call Norma (412.441.3800 x211). Reserve your date AT LEAST one week in advance.

MISSION BOARD MESSAGE BOARD

As you did it unto the least of these, you did it unto me. (Matthew 25:40)

The Facing Systemic Racism Committee is pleased to invite everyone to a weekend of programming to honor the Rev. Dr. Henry Highland Garnet. A noted abolitionist, Garnet was the first African American to speak inside the US Capitol and came to Pittsburgh in 1873. While here, he served as the first pastor of the Grace Memorial Presbyterian Church, which still faithfully gathers in Pittsburgh's Hill District. The legacy of Dr. Garnet continues to inspire those who work tirelessly in pursuit of racial justice within our churches and our society.

In honor of his work as a member of our Presbytery, the third weekend of February has been designated as Henry Highland Garnet weekend. This is the 3rd annual weekend, and the schedule is outlined below:



Sponsored by The Pittsburgh Chapter Black Presbyterian Caucus in conjunction with Anti Racism Transformation Team (AART) Hill District Credit Union, and Pittsburgh Presbytery

Weekend Leader/Teacher
Rev. Dr. Jerry L. Cannon

Vice President of Ministry Innovation, Board of Pensions
(Brother of the late Rev. Dr. Katie Cannon—First African American Woman
Ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church USA)

Save the Dates

Friday, February 20 | 6 PM-8:30 PM
Saturday, February 21 | 8:30 AM-3:00 PM
Bethesda Presbyterian Church
7220 Bennett Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15208

Sunday, February 22 | 11:00 AM
Grace Memorial Presbyterian Church
1000 BrynMawr Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15219

TREE EQUITY in the Pittsburgh Region

Sunday, March 8 after 11 am worship, Social Hall

What is Tree Equity? It means ensuring that communities have equal access and benefits from the presence of trees, regardless of their income level, ethnicity, or location. When communities lack adequate tree canopy, they face higher temperatures, poorer air quality, and greater vulnerability to climate impacts. Disadvantaged Pittsburgh neighborhoods have 20% fewer trees than other neighborhoods. Senior and youth are impacted the most.

On Sunday, March 8, the Environmental Team of the Justice Committee is sponsoring a program about tree equity, including an expert from Tree Pittsburgh and a speaker who will provide a faith perspective—caring for God's creation, seeking justice for God's people, building a more just and resilient future, and restoring the spiritual benefits of trees.

A light lunch will be provided, and the program will also be available online. Contact Nancy Heastings (n.heastings@comcast.net) for more information.

STEP INTO THE STORY OF *Nell and Poll*

As we recognize Black History Month, ELPC's Facing Systemic Racism, Spiritual Life, and Worship, Music, and the Arts Committees invite you to a storywalk on the lives of Nell and Poll, members of a family enslaved and sold by two of our early founders. This unique self-guided experience in the Trustees Room will include six stations that trace significant milestones and moments in the lives of Nell and Poll.

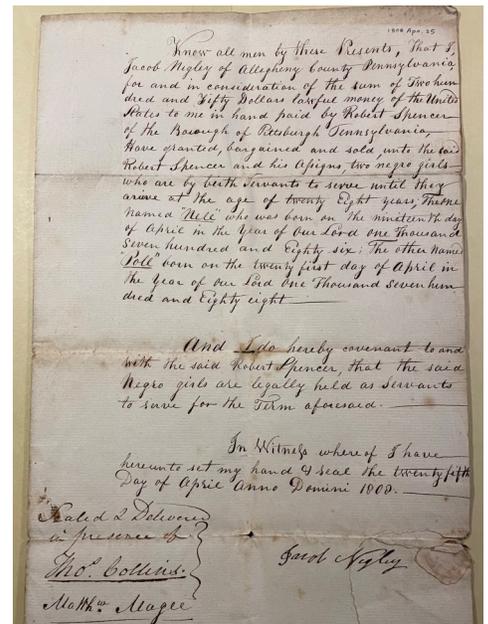
Visitors moving through the storywalk will encounter powerful images paired with prayers, guided meditations, poetry, and reflections designed to deepen their understanding and spark contemplation. This is more than an exhibit—it's an opportunity to pause, pray, and engage with narratives that challenge and inspire.

After completing the walk, visitors will be prompted to share their impressions in a journal. Those thoughts and reflections will help us continue our congregational conversation about faith, art, and the work of dismantling systemic racism. Come and experience this sacred space of learning and reflection. The storywalk will be available in February:

Tuesdays through Fridays from 9 am-8 pm

Saturdays and Sundays from 9 am-3 pm

Please note that on Saturdays, visitors will ONLY be able to access the Trustees Room, not the church more broadly.



Bill of sale for Nell and Poll from Jacob Negley to Robert Spencer (Heinz History Center, Baum Family Papers, MS0110)

PW Retreat at Camp Crestfield **Responding Compassionately to a Hurting World**

How do we live compassionately in a time of violence and despair? Rev. Sarah Robbins will lead us in a deep dive into the wisdom of prophets whose anger and lament was transformed into compassion as a mature response to evil. Through prayer, discussion, exercises and guided reflection, we will practice ways to respond faithfully to an unjust world. Our overnight retreat will begin with dinner at 6 pm on Friday, March 6 and conclude mid-afternoon on Saturday, March 7. Email PW.ELPC@gmail.com to register, or download the forms at: <https://cathedralofhope.org/event/pw-winter-retreat/>.

Retreat brochures, including registration forms, are also available in the Highland Ave hallway. Register after the 11 am worship services in February.



PW Bible Study at ELPC

Finding Our Joy in Christ: I Will Say It Again, Rejoice

Monday, Feb 2, 7-8:30 (*Online only*)

Tuesday, Feb 3 (cancelled in Feb)

The Apostle Paul wrote his brief letter to the Philippians from a Roman prison. Notwithstanding his own suffering, Paul's letter to the Philippians is filled with celebration, joy and hope. Such joy emerges from a deep belief that God is good, and God reigns forever.

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 for more information and Zoom link.

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“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.”

YOUNG ADULT HAPPY HOUR

Happening on the Third Monday of every month from 6-7:30 pm (Feb 16), join us for appetizers and drinks (both alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks available). RSVP to Sara Hackett for location (SaraH@coh.net). Our Young Adult Ministry welcomes all adults post-high school through their 20s and 30s. ALL people and questions are welcome.

LGBTQIA+ MINISTRY

All are invited to the next monthly spiritual gathering of ELPC’s LGBTQIA+ Ministry on Sunday, Feb 8 at 12:30 pm when we share conversation and lunch. Allies and LGBTQIA+ folks alike welcomed.

Contact Wil Forrest,
LGBTQIA+ Ministry
Coordinator, for more info, or if you would like to attend (wil@coh.net;
412.441.3800 x218)

God created you. God loves you. Be yourself.



SOCIAL HOURS

The Membership & Outreach committee recognizes the deep value of providing hospitality for the congregation to get to know each other better. Beginning on the 2nd and 4th Sundays in February, we will have a *social hour* immediately after the 11 am service in the Fellowship Rm.

The M&O Committee will host the 2nd Sunday and will be inviting other ministry groups to help host the 4th Sunday. This is an excellent time to share about a team, group, or committee at ELPC!

Contact Pastor Sarah Robbins (SarahR@coh.net) if you’d like to help host in February, March, or April.