



REACHING OUT

NEWSLETTER OF EAST LIBERTY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

MARCH 2026 | ISSUE TWO

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

116 South Highland Ave
Pittsburgh, PA 15206 

www.ELPC.church



@EastLibertyPresbyterian



PASTORAL NOTE

Rev. Dr. Michael Diaz

*Break through the wall!
Find my dream!
Help me to shatter this darkness,
To smash this night,
To break this shadow
Into a thousand lights of sun,
Into a thousand whirling dreams
Of sun!*
—Langston Hughes,
excerpt from “As I Grew Older”

Langston Hughes once wrote of a dream blocked by shadows and a dream pressed down by walls that felt immovable. His cry feels honest for this season. There are real walls in our world. Real shadows. Rather

than pretending the shadows are not there, Lent is about daring to believe that light can still break through.

What is the good news that still holds us? That was the question we asked last month. This month, I see the good news breaking through all around us.

I see it at tables where neighbors are treated with dignity and beauty. I hear it in the halls at church where honest people are wrestling courageously with faith and justice. I glimpse it in children creating art, youth building friendships, and adults practicing prayer that reshapes the heart.

Already during Lent, I am reminded that good news is luminous and it multiplies. Whether you are adding

morning prayer to your day or a Lenten conversation to your agenda, I hope you are anticipating transformation to take place within you and within us. Remember that God is still shattering the shadows into “a thousand lights of sun.” And somehow, by grace, we get to participate in this holy work.

Where is God inviting you to break through the shadows this month? Where is God asking you to carry light, so you can bring forth good news for yourself and your neighbor?

May we hold on to the good news and may God’s grace hold us as we continue our Lenten journey.

*In Christ,
Pastor Michael*

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PEOPLE NEWS

ELPC welcomes our new members and friend:

Bruce Bancroft, Patricia Bancroft, Maura Bell, Cecelia Dagner, Nathaniel DelleFave, John Denny, Kelley Denny, Craig Jones, Sarah Jones, Ryan Kelley, Julie Kelley, Meghan Mack, Logan Newman, Amanda Potasnik, Niya Szymanski, Katie Rossi (*new friend*)

We extend our condolences to those in our faith family who have recently experienced the loss of a loved one:

- family of Maria Hernandez who passed away shortly after returning to her home country of Mexico;
- Peggy Hodge and her niece Lynn Byrd on the loss of Peggy's sister and Lynne's mother, Sue;
- Joe Harris' family on the passing of his daughter, Crystal on Jan 1; and
- Gail Mallory on the passing of her dear friend Kevin K. on Feb 6.

• UPCOMING CHURCH TOURS •

Sunday, March 22

Tom Morton will lead a tour of the Sanctuary and Chapel.

Sunday, April 19

Join our guides for a tour of the Tower. Please pre-register at tiny.cc/towertour as this tour is limited to 20 participants.

Please gather in the Highland Lobby after the 11 am Sanctuary worship service to join any of our tours.

ELPC COMMUNICATIONS SURVEY

ELPC's new Communications Team is asking for your feedback as we assess our current ELPC communication tools, identify any gaps, and make recommendations about how best to connect with people in the life of the church.

Please complete a brief survey online by scanning this QR code, or by visiting tiny.cc/elpc-communications.



SESSION NEWS

In February, Session voted to begin a strategic visioning process with the Center for Healthy Churches. Beginning in April, ELPC congregants will be invited to participate in prayerful discernment and help shape the next chapter of our shared spiritual life. By fall, we anticipate clarifying our mission and vision through a three-year strategic plan that will guide our ministry together.

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 throughout March:

- **Journey with Scripture** (*Sundays from 9:45-10:45 am, Sunday School class*)
- **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*)

Lenten Conversations:

TELL ME SOMETHING GOOD

Feb 25 through April 1 • 5:30-7 pm

No need to journey through Lent alone! Join Pastor Michael on Wednesday evenings from 5:30-7 pm in the Good Samaritan Room as we gather for honest, hope-filled conversations rooted in Sunday's sermon and our series *Tell Me Something Good*. Together we'll explore Jesus' life through the scriptures and ask deeper questions about the text, the sermon, and what it means for us today. Whether you're curious, weary, skeptical, or hopeful, there's room for you. A light dinner will be served at 6:30 pm.

Please register online at: tiny.cc/tell-me-something-good

ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES

SOUL FOOD

Good Samaritan Room & Zoom

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

March 1: Concluding Discussion of *So You Want to Talk*

About Race by Ijeoma Oluo

March 8, 15, 22, 29: We will begin and continue a discussion of *How We Learn to Be Brave* by Mariann Budde, the Episcopal Bishop of Washington, DC.

SEEKERS

Garth Overlook Room & Zoom

Facilitator: Gwen Puzza (gpuzza9@gmail.com)

March 1: Marcus Borg on Jesus in the 1st and 21st centuries

NY scholar 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 today. He makes the distinctions between the "pre-Easter Jesus" and the "post-Easter Jesus."

March 8, 15, 22: Faces Around the Cross

- March 8: *Mary—The One Who Loved Him Most?*
- March 15: *Judas—The Man Who Loved to Steal*
- March 22: *Caiaphas—Not In My House*

How did the many "faces" around Jesus influence his journey to the crucifixion? Join us as Rev. Dr. Darrell Knopp (Honorably Retired Member of Pittsburgh Presbytery) discusses these first person narratives from characters in the gospels who were present around Jesus, and we discuss our reactions regarding these people.

March 29: From Sadness to Solidarity

What can the examples and stories from the prophets in the Old and New testament teach us about the value of lament, compassion, and solidarity in a time of outrage and despair? Come engage the scriptures and Richard Rohr's writings in *The Tears of Things* with Rev. Sarah Robbins as she shares parts of her presentation from the Presbyterian Women's retreat at Camp Crestfield.

Children & Youth Ministries

Teen Sunday School for 7th-12th grade students

is happening on Sunday, March 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.

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! Register online on our website.

- March 5: Stained Glass art at ELPC
- March 12: Linocut prints at ELPC
- March 19: Papermaking at ELPC
- March 26: Youth Group at Sixth Presbyterian Church
- April 2: No Youth Group

PRAYING WITH ART (Visio Divina) FOR FAMILIES & TWEENS

On Wednesday evenings in Lent from 5-7 pm, families and tweens are invited to share dinner, make art, and explore different ways of praying. 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).

FAMILY GAME DAY WITH HAPPY WANDERERS

ELPC children and their families are meeting after 11am worship on March 15 for a special joint event with ELPC's seniors community group "The Happy Wanderers" for an afternoon of games. ELPC's Children & Youth will teach games from their youth to our seniors, and ELPC seniors will teach games from their youth to our communities' children. Allergy friendly lunch will be provided. All ages welcome. No experience required. RSVP to Sara Hackett (SaraH@coh.net).

PALM SUNDAY PROCESSIONAL

Kids (and parents too!) are invited to join our processional at the beginning of our 11 am service on Palm Sunday, March 29. Kids should meet in the Narthex around 10:50 am to get palm branches and instructions.



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 (March 1) from 9:45-10:45 am.

If you want to meet other families – this is for you!



TYC (Trinity Youth Conference)

TYC is a regional Presbyterian conference for youth who have completed 9th grade through college age students. The week (July 19-25) consists of meaningful workshops, camp games, relevant worship, refreshingly honest small groups, and is planned and led by a youth planning team. TYC happens at Camp Living Waters in Shellsburg, PA.

Information about cost, workshops, registration and schedule can be found online at www.trinityyouthconference.com. Scholarships are available through ELPC. 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. ELPC families are encouraged to register EARLY as registration filled up last summer in early April. Reach out to Sara Hackett (SaraH@coh.net) for an early registration link.

SSA TRAINING RESCHEDULED

All are invited to attend the RESCHEDULED training session on:

**Saturday, March 21
from 1-4 pm
in McKelvy Room**

on how to remain safe if an intruder enters the church building, hosted by ELPC’s Safety and Security Advisory Committee.

Pre-register by March 15 at tiny.cc/safety-training, or contact Jen King (412.441.3800 x222).



ELPC’s *Spiritual Pathways Series:* **LISTENING FOR GOD’S HEARTBEAT**



Retreat: **April 24-26
at the Villa Maria Retreat Center**

Classes: **Wednesdays, April 29, May 6, 13, 20
from 5:30- 7 pm at ELPC**

Register online: <http://tiny.cc/gods-heartbeat> (by April 12)

Our gatherings will be based on Phillip Newell’s *Listening for the Heartbeat of God: Celtic Daily Prayer*, inviting participants into the rich stream of Celtic spirituality through ways of listening for God. We will explore different movements of listening — for goodness, within creation, for God in all things, with imagination, and in action. We will pair a reflection on a chapter with a contemplative practice such as reimagining the Jesus Prayer, walking attentively in creation, gathering the graces, engaging the imagination, and embracing a “chaos of uncalculating love.”

Framed by liturgy from the *Celtic Book of Daily Prayer*, our time together will continually return to the themes of our belovedness, discovering God in creation, the sacred role of mystery and imagination, and the wide, inclusive nature of God’s love.

Our facilitator, Rev. Jeff Eddings, currently serves as the Spiritual Formation and Coaching Associate for the 1001 New Worshiping Communities Initiative in the PC(USA). He oversees a network of 100 coaches and pastored Hot Metal Bridge Faith Community in Pittsburgh from 2004 to 2019. The Ignatian motto of ‘finding God in all things’ is one he seeks to live by.

MISSION BOARD MESSAGE BOARD

Personal Perspective: The Chapel Market Neighbors' Dinner is Beautiful!

by Sung C. Yoo



Without understanding my role as a volunteer table host, I calmly entered the Good Samaritan dining room with hidden curiosity about the Chapel Market dinner, held monthly by ELPC's Neighbors Committee.

The minute I entered, I saw many volunteers who were busy setting up round tables with colorful tablecloths, placemats, silverware, china, and centerpieces with fresh flowers. The whole setting looked like a formal restaurant, which I did not expect for this occasion. A bit puzzled, I asked one volunteer, "Who is coming for this dinner?" The answer was "Neighbors," meaning hungry people in the East Liberty neighborhood.

By dinnertime, the room was decorated and Christmas carols were playing. Soon, people of God started to arrive and take seats at any table of their choice—not by class level or looks, but in total equality. We were shoulder to shoulder in a warm and joyful environment. After the pastor prayed for the people and for the gathering and food, we all began to eat, talking at the same table, eating the same foods, and laughing together in loud voices with a delightful spirit. While observing this whole scene, I realized that Christians and the Church are for serving the needs of human beings, bonding with mutual respect, and forming friendship of genuine human community.

Thankfully, I received a woman who walked with difficulty, with a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis, wearing a heavy coat and holding many bags. With assistance, she took a seat and ordered her food. When she started to eat, she began to talk about how this dinner was beautiful. Repeatedly she said that it was amazing to be there.

Listening, I asked her why this dinner was beautiful. Her answer was simple: beautiful serving with good food. She said that she had heard about this church a long time ago, but she had never been in it. But today as she passed by and saw the sign about dinner, she decided to walk in.

Through hearing her comments, I began to think about the hospitality of ELPC as it reflects Jesus' teaching of the invitation for the poor and my own experiences in fixed cultural models. My traditional cultural views of the poor were totally different. But I remembered words Jesus taught: *When you host supper, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, or other relatives, or your rich neighbors. But when you give a party, ask the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. (Luke 14:12-13)* I was full of joy in hearing her say, "The neighbors' dinner is beautiful!"

TREE EQUITY in the Pittsburgh Region

Sunday, March 8 after 11 am worship

The Environmental Team of the Justice Committee is currently focusing on the issue of Tree Equity — ensuring that all communities have equal access and benefits from the presence of trees. Disadvantaged Pittsburgh neighborhoods have 20% fewer trees, which has serious implications for health outcomes.

The March 8 program, planned from 12:30–1:30 pm, will include an expert from Tree Pittsburgh and a speaker from the National Religious Partnership for the Environment, who will provide a faith and justice perspective.

Light refreshments will be provided in the Fellowship Room.

Tree Pittsburgh and the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy will offer advice on tree maintenance, volunteer opportunities, how to get a tree for your yard, and more. See them and our Landscape Subcommittee in the Garth Overlook Room. Tree activities in underserved neighborhoods will be coming in the spring and fall. The program will also be available online. Contact Nancy Heastings for the zoom link (n.heastings@comcast.net).

HUNGER ADVOCACY WORKSHOP OPPORTUNITY

After its recent hosting of several training sessions on effective advocacy, the Justice Committee encourages us to consider an additional opportunity sponsored by our friends at Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania and SWPA Bread for the World.

RISING TO THE CHALLENGE: 2026 Hunger Advocacy Workshop

Saturday, March 14 • 9 am–1 pm
at the Kearns Spirituality Center (Allison Park)

This workshop will feature an all-star lineup of speakers to help us understand the complexities and possibilities of our current environment, including Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture Russell Redding, Rev. Heather Taylor, Managing Director of

Bread for the World, as well as a panel of local experts who will explore the shape of hunger in our own neighborhoods.

Admission is free.
Sign up at: bit.ly/bread2026



PRAYER AND ADVOCACY FOR IMMIGRANTS

Just a reminder that an *Interfaith Prayer Vigil* is held in front of the ICE building on the South Side (3000 Sidney Street) each Friday morning from 8:30–9:30 am.

Various groups and churches, including ELPC, rotate leadership of the short service, and ELPC always has a strong presence there. All are welcome and needed!

PW BIBLE STUDY AT ELPC

Finding Our Identity in Christ: The Woman Who Was Bent Over

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

Tuesday, March 3, 10 am-Noon (hybrid)

What is your identity? The unnamed woman in Luke 13 was identified by her disability and Jesus affirmed her identity as a child of God. In this healing story, we are claimed as God's children and called to participate in God's justice and love in the world.

Join us on Monday, March 2 from 7–8:30 pm (Zoom), or on Tuesday, March 3 from 10 am–12 pm (hybrid). 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

On Monday, March 16, the Young Adult Happy Hour continues at Rev. Michael Diaz and Nino Testo's home in Stanton Heights. Happening on the Third Monday of every month from 6:00-7:30 pm, join us for appetizers and drinks (both alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks available). RSVP online for location details. Our Young Adult Ministry welcomes all adults post-high school through their 20s and 30s. ALL people and questions are welcome! RSVP at <https://invite.social/ipuhrmbkfgbrsrpg>

LGBTQIA+ MINISTRY

All are invited to the next monthly spiritual gathering of ELPC’s LGBTQIA+ Ministry on Sunday, March 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.

