

# Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania

Serving 10 Counties, 29 Church Bodies, 2,000 Congregations and 1,000,000 Christian Members

## The Call . . .

On the Web: [www.casp.org](http://www.casp.org)

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Pittsburgh Theological Seminary  
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616 North Highland Avenue - Pittsburgh, PA 15206

to be one in Christ



June/July/August 2026, Number 3

*A Unifying Voice in the Name of Jesus Christ for the Mission of the Gospel and the Wholeness of Communities*

### Christian Associates to Honor “Ecumenical Twins” For Their Contributions to Christian Unity

Bishop Emeritus David A. Zubik of the Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh and Bishop Emeritus Kurt Kusserow of the Southwestern PA Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, will be the first recipients of Christian Associates’ new John 17 Awards.

The awards recognize outstanding achievement in Christian unity, judicatory leadership, and interfaith engagement.

On Sunday, August 30 at 3 p.m. at Shadyside Presbyterian Church (5121 Westminister Place, Pittsburgh 15232) Christian Associates will present the awards at a festive afternoon tea party.

At the event, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary President Dr. Asa J. Lee will moderate a conversation between Bishops Zubik and Kusserow, exploring the ways that friendship,



Bishop Emeritus Kurt Kusserow (left)  
and Bishop Emeritus David A. Zubik

trust, and curiosity build bridges across denominations and faith traditions.

Zubik and Kusserow were installed within weeks of one another in summer 2007, and both retired in summer of 2025. Throughout their ministries, both were leaders among Christian Associates’ Council of Bishops and Judicatory

Executives, and engaged in many other initiatives promoting Christian unity and interfaith relations.

“I’m excited to celebrate these great friends of Christian Associates, to hear their insights, and to enjoy festive food and conversation with so many supporters of ministries that bring diverse people of faith together,” said Rev. Liddy Barlow. “Let’s celebrate Christian uni-TEA!”

Proceeds from the event support Christian Associates’ expanding ministries of collegiality, collaboration, and connectedness. Sponsorships are available at a variety of price points, and both group tables and individual tickets are offered as well.

Visit [casp.org/tea](http://casp.org/tea) for full details and to reserve your ticket or sponsorship.

### New Sermon Collection Will Be Released at June 24 Event

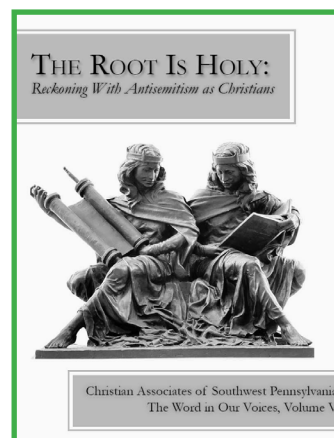
Twelve busy months of programming shared by Christian Associates and the Holocaust Center of Pittsburgh culminates in **Reckoning with Antisemitism as Christians: Reflections at One Year.**

The free event takes place Wednesday, June 24 at 7 p.m. at Beit Kulanu (the new merged synagogue formerly known as Rodef Shalom, 4905 Fifth Ave, Pittsburgh 15213). Register now by visiting [bit.ly/reckoningoneyear](http://bit.ly/reckoningoneyear).

Christian leaders who have engaged in *Reckoning with Antisemitism as Christians* over the past year will share how the text studies, educational opportunities, preaching challenge,

and encounters with Jewish neighbors have enriched their ministry and deepened their understanding. And Jewish leaders will respond, sharing the ways this project has comforted and challenged them in return.

The event celebrates the launch of a sermon collection, *The Root Is Holy: Reckoning with Antisemitism as Christians*. The book, featuring sermons and essays by over two dozen local Christian leaders, is



the fifth volume in Christian Associates’ *The Word in Our Voices* series.

The book features writing addressing how scripture has been interpreted in anti-Jewish ways, exploring the important Jewish context of the New Testament, and reimagining harmful readings of these texts in ways that yield new insight.

All event attendees will receive a free print copy of *The Root Is Holy*. Additional copies can be ordered at [casp.org/reckoning](http://casp.org/reckoning), where you can also download the book as a PDF.

# REFLECTIONS ALONG THE WAY

Dear friends,

It is no small privilege for a white girl from New Hampshire to stand in the pulpit of a Black congregation.

I grew up in a community that was almost entirely monochromatic. As a child, my only knowledge of Black history and culture came from classroom Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebrations and The Cosby Show on TV. As an adult, I'm so grateful to the Black colleagues and friends who have vastly expanded my perspectives and had patience for my mistakes. For a pastor to entrust me with her congregation—even just for seven to ten minutes!—is a generous gift of trust.



Photo by Brian Cohen

On Good Friday, the Rev. Dr. Barbara Gunn invited a group of nine preachers to join her at Mount Carmel Baptist Church in North Versailles. In lieu of a traditional “seven last words” format, she asked each of us briefly to consider a text that confronts the meaning of Jesus’ death, under the theme “Good Grief: What’s So Good About It?”

The text she assigned me, 1 Peter 2:23-24, lent itself well to one of my favorite kinds of sermons. I love digging into what’s weird, unexpected, or apparently problematic in the Bible. I love pointing out the odd inconsistencies, easily overlooked, that turn scripture from thin platitudes to rich complexity. I love leading listeners down into a place of discomfort before we, together, find the insight and consolation that the Good Book always yields.

And so, at Mount Carmel, I dug in to Peter’s letter, and his description of Jesus’ patient suffering. In stark contrast to the polite, attentive silence of the “frozen chosen” in predominantly-white mainline churches, the homiletic moment in the Black church is audibly interactive. The sermon is a conversation, not a lecture. The peoples’ responses carry the preacher forward like an ocean current, punctuating each point: “Amen! Yes! Mercy! Hallelujah!”

“These verses have hard neighbors,” I preached. Immediately before them, we read “slaves, be subject to your masters.” Not long after them, we read “wives, submit to your husbands.”

“Of course, we know ‘All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,’” I continued. “But that doesn’t mean that all scripture is equally easy to understand and to love.”

And from the pews before me, I heard a colleague reply: “*Fix it!*”

I was stopped short by this cry. That’s exactly our calling as preachers and teachers, isn’t it? To stand in the gap between the visible evidence of a broken world and the Bible’s promise that God is on the throne. To take on faulty interpretations of scripture and replace them with news that is truly good. To fix the ways the church has caused harm, and remind our hearers that God’s work is always and only for healing, reconciliation, and love.

The call to *fix it* also animates the sermons and essays included in *The Root Is Holy*, our new publication celebrating the Reckoning with Antisemitism as Christians project. Addressing some of the thorniest texts of scripture, colleagues across Southwest Pennsylvania found ways to preach a saving word to Christians, without causing harm to Jewish neighbors. I hope you will order or download a copy.



Rev. Liddy Barlow (far right) with fellow preachers at Mount Carmel Baptist Church. Senior Pastor Rev. Dr. Barbara A. Gunn is seated at center.

Jesus’ presence in the middle of these hard scriptures is a demonstration of his solidarity with all who suffer, I suggested. The cross is Jesus’ answer to how we are to live in an unjust world. The cross is how Jesus *fixed* it. And trusting in his living presence, now we follow in his way.

Your sister in Christ,

The Rev. Liddy Barlow  
Executive Minister

## Celebrate America 250 with Neighbors at America's Potluck

On Sunday, July 5, people across the country will observe America's 250th anniversary by celebrating in a very American way: breaking bread with neighbors, each bringing their own food and tradition to share. "America's Potluck" is a national initiative designed to bring people together across difference and celebrate all we share.

A community-wide America's Potluck takes place from 4-7 p.m. at the Jewish Community Center's Family Park in Monroeville (261 Rosecrest Drive, 15146). A successor to the "Love Anyway" feasts hosted in 2024 and 2025, our event is a shared initiative of Christian Associates, the JCC's



Center for Loving Kindness, Common Ground USA, Stand for All Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, North Hills Community Baptist Church, AHINSA, and other partners.

Bring a dish to share, and join in intentional conversation with neighbors

from all walks of life. Enjoy musical selections, lawn games, mini golf, and the Olympic-sized swimming pool. Bring the whole family!

Advance registration is strongly encouraged by visiting: [jccpgh.formstack.com/forms/america\\_250\\_potluck\\_rsvp](http://jccpgh.formstack.com/forms/america_250_potluck_rsvp)

Can't make it to Monroeville? You can participate by holding your own "America's Potluck" at your church, in your neighborhood, or in your own backyard. Visit [america250.utah.gov/americanpotluck/](http://america250.utah.gov/americanpotluck/) for information on how to plan, promote, and execute your event.

## Join in Celebrating the 'Season of Creation' This Fall

While the exuberance of summer is newly upon us, ecumenical leaders around the world are looking ahead to fall celebrations of the Season of Creation.

Traditionally celebrated from September 1, the Day of Prayer for Creation, and October 4, the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology beloved by many Christian denominations.

In recent years, statements from religious leaders around the world have also encouraged the faithful to take time to care for creation during the month-long celebration.

"To care for creation is an essential expression of Christian discipleship and an integral mark of the Church's mission: to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and to sustain and renew the life of the earth," writes Dame Sarah Mulally, Archbishop of Canterbury. "As we follow Christ, we are called to share



in his reconciling work, seeking justice, healing, and hope for the earth and for all who dwell within it."

This year's theme, "Living Water," explores Ezekiel 47:9,12 as a powerful biblical vision of hope and ecological healing. The image of living water flowing from God's sanctuary reveals divine healing that renews land, water, biodiversity, and human responsibility toward the whole of creation.

The Season of Creation website, [seasonofcreation.org](http://seasonofcreation.org), offers a multitude

of free multilingual resources. These include prayer services, historical and theological interpretations of Ezekiel, and ideas for activities to engage congregants of all ages in caring for creation.

All official Season of Creation materials are available at no cost and with no copyright requirements, including but not limited to the Season of Creation Celebration Guide, social media imagery and other branded materials and resources.

The Season of Creation is a time to renew our relationship with our Creator and all creation through celebration, conversion, and commitment together. During the Season of Creation, join your sisters and brothers in the ecumenical family in prayer and action for our common home.

***"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."***

*-Ephesians 4:3*

## Addiction Prayer Service Offers Solace in Community



Participants light memorial candles at the 2025 Addiction Prayer Service.

For over a decade, the community of greater Pittsburgh has gathered to commemorate International Overdose Awareness Day in late August, pledging to remember those who have died, to support first responders in their life-saving work, and to surround surviving family and friends with care.

While Allegheny County deaths by overdose have decreased by over 50% from their peak in 2017, the county still lost nearly 300 residents—each one a beloved child of God—to opioid overdoses in 2025. Addiction in all its forms continues to devastate lives and strain family and community relationships.

This year's **Addiction Prayer Service** takes place on **Friday, August 28** at noon at **Trinity Cathedral** (328 Sixth Ave, Pittsburgh 15222), and will feature prayers and remarks from clergy, community leaders, and people directly affected by addiction and overdose, including family members and survivors. The cathedral's bell will begin tolling prior to the service, ringing once for each person who died by overdose in Allegheny County in 2025.

If overdose or addiction have touched your life, you are not alone. Join us on August 28 for a time of solace and community.

## Wee Kirk Conference Supports Small Churches

No matter what their denominational affiliation, small churches share important gifts and challenges. This fall, gather with other small church clergy and lay leaders at the annual Wee Kirk Conference: October 12-14 at beautiful Laurelville Retreat Center in Mount Pleasant.

The conference's purpose is to inspire, equip, motivate, and encourage small churches and to provide rest and refreshment for their clergy and lay leaders.

This year's plenary speakers include Pittsburgh Theological Seminary professor Dr. Tucker Ferda, Presbytery of West Virginia Executive Presbyter Rev. Maureen Wright, and Westminster College chaplain Rev. Dr. Jim Mohr.

As always, a full slate of workshops and an expansive, beautifully curated bookstore from Hearts & Minds Books are also on offer.

Registration costs are on a sliding scale according to congregation size and



range from \$225-\$375. Lodging and meals are included in the price. Register before August 1 for early bird pricing.

Find registration and more details at [wee-kirk-ne.org](http://wee-kirk-ne.org).

## Add Your Event to the United Against Hate Week Calendar

For the second year running, our community will celebrate **United Against Hate Week**, October 18-24, sponsored by Stand for All Pittsburgh.

The week features a calendar full of opportunities for greater Pittsburgh to affirm community values of safety, equity, inclusion, and belonging for all, while raising awareness about the harmful impacts of hate and bias.

Perhaps your church or organization already have an event planned during the week of October 18-24 that would fit right in to United Against Hate Week. Or perhaps you would like to sponsor or co-sponsor a new event during the week, such as a film screening, webinar, forum, book discussion, training, concert, art show, social event, or festival.

To get inspired, check out the toolkit at [unitedagainsthateweek.org](http://unitedagainsthateweek.org), or reach

out to Rev. Liddy Barlow (chairperson of the Stand for All Pittsburgh Community Engagement Committee) to brainstorm ideas and make connections: [lbarlow@casp.org](mailto:lbarlow@casp.org).

Once your event is planned, you can add it to the calendar by clicking the green button at [unitedagainsthateweek.org/events-calendar](http://unitedagainsthateweek.org/events-calendar). The group hopes to have all events listed on the calendar by September 15.

## Spring Events Bring Christian Leaders Together



Christian leaders gathered on Mount Washington for the 35th annual Easter Blessing of the City.



Rev. Liddy Barlow moderated a panel on the Future of Congregations as part of Bower Hill Church's 75th anniversary commemorations.



Bishop Larry Kulick of the Catholic Diocese of Greensburg welcomed Rev. Liddy Barlow to the diocese's prayer vigil for peace on April 11. The vigil took place at the same time as Pope Leo XIV led prayers for peace in Rome.



Dr. Deborah Moon offered the keynote address at the Pittsburgh Pastoral Care Conference.



Canon Catherine Brall of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh (left) and Rev. Jessica McClure Archer of Pittsburgh Presbytery share in conversation at the May meeting of the Council of Bishops & Judicatory Executives, exploring a statement on Christian nationalism prepared by Christian Associates' Theology & Education Committee.

## Roman Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh Welcomes All to FestPGH



Alt-rock band Switchfoot will perform at FestPGH.

On Saturday, Sept. 19, 2026, Highmark Stadium will resound with the music of bands including the headliner Switchfoot, as well as laughter, games, family fun, service opportunities and worship during the inaugural FestPGH music and arts festival.

Hosted by the Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh, FestPGH's mission

is "Connect, Serve, Celebrate." Featured musical genres range from alternative rock to praise, hip-hop and soul. A "performance painter" will create works of art on stage. Multiple activities are intended to deepen the faith of participants and their awareness of those in need.

"FestPGH brings the light of Christ outside the walls of the Church, allowing us to celebrate faith while welcoming those who may not share it," said Bishop Mark

Eckman of the Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh, who will celebrate Mass at 4 p.m.

"All Pittsburghers are invited to experience the joy of music, community and shared activities, as well as to pray and worship together."

Main stage artists include Grammy-winning alternative rock band Switchfoot, indie folk and bluegrass band The Arcadian Wild, singer-songwriter Jervis Campbell, hip-hop DJ Jared Coad, and country artist Josh Blakesley.

FestPGH is designed for families, with stroller-friendly paths and an area with crafts, games, and stations for nursing and changing.

Other areas will help people explore service opportunities. Faith in Action Village offers encounters with service organizations and ministries to those in need. Attendees can speak with representatives, ask questions, and hear their testimonies. The Artist Market will feature art by local and regional artists.

Admission is free, but an online RSVP and digital ticket are required: visit [festpgh.org/register](http://festpgh.org/register).

*(text courtesy Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh)*

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### Bringing Hands Together To Serve Our Neighbors...Again!

How much more could our churches do if we worked together?

In January, we sought to answer that question through the first Hands Together event. We invited churches that have abundant resources and need opportunities to serve. We invited churches that offer hands-on service opportunities and could use more resources. Together, lay leaders and clergy from these churches came together for conversation, idea-sharing, and partnership. The event produced tangible results: more food and clothing for our neighbors in need, fresh opportunities for service, new friends.



This summer, we're offering another Hands Together networking opportunity. Whether you attended in January or if this idea is new to you, we are sure your ministries will benefit from making connections and meeting your neighbors.

Join us on **Thursday, July 16** at 1:30 p.m. at St. Paul of the Cross Spiritual Center (148 Monastery Avenue, Pittsburgh 15203).

Bring a team from your church! Clergy, lay leaders, and other volunteers are all welcome. Advance registration is preferred by visiting [casp.org/handstogether](http://casp.org/handstogether).

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