

# Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania

Serving 10 Counties, 28 Church Bodies, 2,000 Congregations and 1,000,000 Christian Members

## The Call . . .

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Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

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616 North Highland Avenue - Pittsburgh, PA 15206

*to be one in Christ*



April-May 2025, Number 2

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

### Ecumenical Celebration on April 27 Marks 1700th Anniversary of Nicaea

One thousand seven hundred years ago, Christians from across the known world gathered for the first ecumenical council. Together, they discerned the theological foundations that would guide the church for centuries to come.



Metropolitan Savas, Bishop David Zubik, Bishop Kurt Kusserow

the Southwestern PA Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

It will also include rousing congregational song and music from many traditions; prayer and scripture; and, of course, the opportunity to declare the Nicene Creed together as one.

We all owe much to the leaders of the First Council of Nicaea. In this anniversary year, let's gather to celebrate the unity that they made possible: a unity experienced in a special way this spring as the whole church, East and West alike, celebrate Easter on the same date.

On **Sunday, April 27**, at 2:30 p.m., at Sacred Heart Church (310 Shady Avenue, Pittsburgh 15206) in Shadyside, Bishop

David Zubik of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh invites Christians of every tradition to **We Believe: An Ecumenical Celebration of the 1700th Anniversary of the Council of Nicaea**.

The service includes three short homilies from local Christian leaders: Bishop Zubik, Metropolitan Savas of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Pittsburgh, and Bishop Kurt Kusserow of

“For sixty generations, Christians have used these beloved words to summarize and share their faith,” said Christian Associates Executive Minister Rev. Liddy Barlow. “So often, our community has planned ecumenical worship in times of tragedy or crisis. This anniversary affords us the opportunity instead to come together in celebration, as we give thanks for all that unites us.”

### Share Your Sermon About Reckoning with Antisemitism

Christian Associates and the Holocaust Center of Pittsburgh will be publishing a book next spring sharing the ways that preachers in our region are reckoning with antisemitism from the pulpit, as part of *The Word in Our Voices* series.

We are currently collecting sermons that reckon with ways that the scripture has been interpreted in anti-Jewish ways and reimagine readings of these texts that help us better love our neighbors.

Preachers are invited to submit a manuscript or recording of a sermon that might:

- **Reflect** on your personal journey of reckoning with antisemitism in the Christian tradition
- **Deepen** your parish's understanding of the Jewish context of the New Testament
- **Connect** specific interpretations of Christian texts to concrete antisemitic actions towards the Jewish community, across history and in the present day
- **Name and explore** the emotional experience (discomfort, anger, sorrow, defensiveness, deflection, etc) of wrestling with cherished scriptures that have nevertheless been used for harm
- And/or **offer** fresh readings of texts that move beyond the surface interpretations that have led to anti-Jewish perspectives taking hold in Christian communities.

Sermons may be submitted using the form found at [casp.org/reckoning](http://casp.org/reckoning). Both text documents and audio/video recordings are welcome. Essays, memoirs, newsletter articles, and other pieces of writing are also appropriate for submission.

Preachers whose pieces are selected for publication will receive a printed copy of the book and will be recognized at a book launch event in late spring 2026.

# REFLECTIONS ALONG THE WAY

Dear friends,

I admit it: I'm a church nerd. A polity geek. A liturgy wonk. A church history nut. Sometimes my excitement about church stuff is a little greater than that of the average guy on the street. For instance, in the past few months, I've had several conversations like this:

**Neighbor:** What's going on a Christian Associates this year?

**Me:** Lots of good stuff! We're continuing to work on addressing hate, especially antisemitism. We're engaging in projects around preventing political violence and promoting social cohesion. We're building new bridges with evangelical and independent churches.

**Neighbor:** Wow, that all sounds great.

**Me:** Ooh, and I'm also really excited about the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea!

**Neighbor** (*backing away slowly, with raised eyebrows and a skeptical smirk*): Uh, ok, have fun with that.

I get it. Nicaea 1700 is not a milestone on the pop culture radar screen. At first glance, it sounds pretty niche. Why should anyone but the nerdiest of church nerds care about something that happened so very long ago?

But I believe this anniversary year is not just for people like me. I think it's a rich opportunity for all of us to reconsider what is most essential about our faith. Nicaea matters. Here's why:

**Nicaea matters because Jesus matters.** The central issue at the Council was the nature of Christ. After sometimes-bitter arguments (and even St. Nicholas' infamous fistfight!), the answer became clear: Jesus was fully God and fully man, *homoousios* with the Father. Christ's nature is the key to our understanding of the Divine. Jesus Christ is God who walked among us, knew our human experience from the inside, and draws us to himself.

**Nicaea matters because empire matters.** Constantine, the first Christian to be emperor of Rome, convened and hosted the Council, raising fascinating questions about how we perceive the role of the state in our faith today. With Christian nationalism and authoritarian politics on the rise, how can the church faithfully engage with civic power?

**Nicaea matters because diversity matters.** Bishops traveled to the Council from across the Christian world, coming to modern-day Turkey from as far away as Spain and Persia. At a time when travel was treacherous and communication challenging, they prioritized the formation of a worldwide Christian voice. We can follow their example as we dare to bridge today's obstacles to unity.

**Nicaea matters because faith formation matters.** For 1700 years, Christians have not only treasured but shared the teaching developed at the Council. Our ancestors passed the faith from one person to the next, across continents and cultures, across sixty generations. Will the faith of Nicaea be cherished in a sixty-first generation? That's up to us.

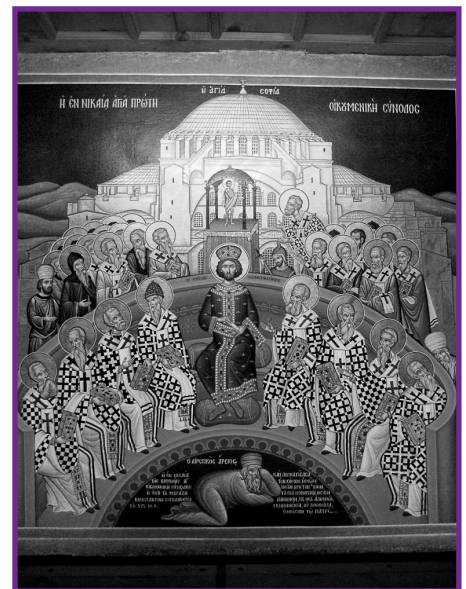
**Nicaea matters because Easter matters.** The Council worked out a shared calculation of the date of Easter, so that Christians can offer a united witness to the resurrection. This year, as a happy coincidence, the Gregorian and Julian calendars align, offering us the opportunity to celebrate Easter together in both East and West. Whether we shout "Christos anesti!" or "Khristos voskrese!" or "Christ is risen!" we do so in unison with siblings across the globe.

And so let us celebrate, church nerds and cool kids alike, as we mark this milestone together. I look forward to seeing you at **We Believe: An Ecumenical Celebration of the 1700th Anniversary of the Council of Nicaea** at Sacred Heart Church at 2:30 p.m. on April 27!

Your sister in Christ,



The Rev. Liddy Barlow  
Executive Minister



Icon from the Mégalo Metéoron Monastery in Greece representing the First Ecumenical Council of Nikea 325 A.D.

## Pittsburgh Pastoral Care Conference Registration Now Open

Registration is now open for the 25th annual Pittsburgh Pastoral Care Conference, **Making the Impossible Possible**, featuring keynote speaker Bill Strickland.



Bill Strickland

The conference takes place from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Friday, May 2 at Saints John & Paul Roman Catholic Church, St. Luke the Evangelist Parish, 2586 Wexford Bayne Road, Sewickley, 15143.

Mr. Strickland is the founder of Manchester Bidwell Corporation, which offers vocational training, arts experiences, and world-class jazz on Pittsburgh's North Side. Inspired by his work in Pittsburgh, he has guided the creation of more than a dozen similar centers in the United States, Canada, and Israel. He was awarded a 1996 MacArthur Fellows "Genius" grant and has received 27 honorary doctoral degrees.

The conference also features workshops on a wide array of topics, including:

- "End of Life Spiritual Care, Palliative Care, and Hospice" with Pastor Kimberly Rapczak, Allegheny Health Network
- "Building Healthy and Spiritually Grounded Leadership Teams" with

the Rev. Erik Hoeke, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

- "Leading Churches Through Change and Crises" with Rev. Ralph Lowe, Pittsburgh Presbytery, and Rev. Dr. Graham Standish, Samaritan Counseling

The day concludes with a Bible study exploring stories of miracles led by a panel of diverse local leaders, including the Rev. Dr. Sheila Johnson Hunt, immediate past president of the Baptist Ministers Conference of Pittsburgh and Vicinity, and the Rev. Jessica McClure Archer, General Minister of Pittsburgh Presbytery.

Information about sponsorship and tabling opportunities are also available at [pghpcc.org](http://pghpcc.org).

## Executive Minister to Lead Local Retreats in May

The Rev. Liddy Barlow, Executive Minister of Christian Associates, will lead two local retreats in the coming months.

### 20th Annual Women's Day of Reflection Retreat

First up is "**Do Whatever He Tells You**": Revisiting the Wedding Feast of Cana," the 20th Annual Women's Day of Reflection sponsored by the Byzantine Catholic Archeparchal Office of Religious Education. The retreat takes place on Saturday, May 17 from 9:00 a.m.-2:30 p.m. at Kearns Spirituality Center, La Roche University.

Rev. Barlow will reflect on the role of Mary in Jesus' first miracle and the way that we can apply her vision and voice as faithful disciples today.

Fr. Thomas Bailey, OSB, will also present. Fr. Bailey is a member of the Benedictine Marmion Abbey in Aurora, Ill. He serves as director of human formation and professor at the Byzantine Catholic Seminary of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Pittsburgh. His guided reflection will show participants "how empty jars can lead to overflowing grace."



The cost of \$40 includes a box lunch; on-site accommodations and massage therapy sessions are available for an additional fee. Please **register by May 3** by contacting Sister Marion Dobos, [mdobos1@gmail.com](mailto:mdobos1@gmail.com).

### Shenango Presbytery Retreat

Rev. Barlow will also lead the Shenango Presbytery Pastors Retreat from May 19-20 at Villa Maria Education & Spirituality Center in Pulaski, Pa. The retreat is inspired by **receptive ecumenism**.

As framed by Dr. Paul Murray of Durham University, "The essential principle behind Receptive Ecumenism is that the primary ecumenical responsibility is to ask not 'What do the other traditions first need to learn from us?' but 'What do we need to learn from them?' The assumption is that if all were asking this question seriously and acting upon it then all would be moving in ways that would both deepen our authentic respective identities and draw us into a more intimate relationship."

The retreat invites participants to assume a posture of humility and learning as we consider Christian traditions other than our own. It offers opportunities to participate in practices not usually associated with the Reformed tradition, including praying with icons, praying the rosary, and giving testimony, and to reflect on what these practices might have to teach us.

The retreat is open to clergy from all traditions. Registration fees range from \$70-\$125, with overnight accommodations available. Please register by May 2 at [shenango.org/coming-events](http://shenango.org/coming-events).



## 'Congregations for Canopy' Summit Offers Inspiration for Faith-Based Environmental Work

By Melanie Linn Gutowski

In February, Tree Pittsburgh put on an event that had been more than 15 years in the making: Congregations for Canopy, a daylong summit which brought together local organizations and dozens of participants from varying faith traditions, all of whom had one thing in common: a desire to care for God's creation as part of their ministry.

The summit, hosted at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, opened with remarks from Congresswoman Summer Lee, who shared her experiences with Pittsburgh's pollution during her childhood in the steel town of Braddock and called local faith leaders "essential" in inspiring positive momentum in this arena.

"Faith leaders hold a unique power," Lee said. "You are trusted voices. You speak to the hearts of your congregations every single week. And you know better than anyone that caring for our earth is sacred work. Every faith tradition represented here today shares a common thread: Stewardship. Responsibility. Love for our neighbors."

Environmental efforts can be practiced in a big way or in small ones, fitting into your organization's means—and even small steps, such as these make a big difference:



- Invite a local environmental organization to present to your congregation, or partner with them to send volunteers from your place of worship to one of their community projects.
- Use your space to host a local distribution point for efforts such as PA Plants Native or TreeVitalize, which connect members of the public with native trees and shrubs several times per year. Your group can also apply to receive free native plants from these organizations.
- If your site is an urban one with limited space for planting, even native plants grown in containers can make a huge difference to local wildlife, providing waystations

for birds, bees and butterflies as they travel between feeding areas. Creating rain gardens in the edging of your parking lot can help divert runoff from your buildings and sustain local wildlife, a win-win.

- If you have a lot of undeveloped property, you may consider hosting a "bio-blitz" event to help discover which species of plants and animals you already play host to—this can help in planning which environmental projects might best suit your site, and can bring newcomers to your location.
- Leverage local volunteer groups. Girl Scouts, Scouting America (formerly Boy Scouts), and state-wide programs such as PA Master Gardener and PA Master Naturalist have ready-made corps of volunteers who are committed to helping their communities, especially with environmental work. Members of these groups often have a project-based or ongoing annual volunteer hour requirement to fulfill, which provides mutual benefit.

"Faith without works is dead, right?" Congresswoman Lee said in February. "This is the work. Because environmental justice is social justice. And social justice is faith in action."

## New "Stand for All Pittsburgh" Coalition Plans Training Workshop

Loving our neighbors means helping ensure that no one in our communities faces hate or bias. A new coalition of community organizations, including Christian Associates, Mediators Beyond Borders, the JCC Center for Loving Kindness, the 10.27 Healing Partnership, Center of Life, Casa San José, and many others, is pursuing that vision through a new community collaboration: **Stand for All Pittsburgh**.

Supported by Not In Our Town and convened by The Hear Foundation, Stand for All Pittsburgh's mission is to mobilize the Greater Pittsburgh community to prevent, identify, and address bias and hate incidents in order to create a safer community of inclusion and belonging for all.

The group is offering a community training workshop, **Learning Together: Effective Responses to Hate and Bias Incidents**, on Thursday, May 1 from 3:30 to 8:00 p.m., including dinner.

The interactive knowledge-building session welcomes community leaders and volunteers who would like to help shape greater Pittsburgh's response to hate and bias. Through tabletop exercises, discussion, and sharing, it will explore resources and proven strategies for responding to hate incidents, supporting victims, activating young people as leaders, engaging law enforcement, and building community support.

Workshop leaders include Daphne Felten-Green and Patrice O'Neill. Felten-Green is an attorney, civil rights trainer, mediator, and facilitator of community dialogue who helps people work collaboratively to prevent, respond to and report hate crimes and hate incidents. O'Neill is a filmmaker; her 1995 film *Not In Our Town* began as a half-hour PBS special and turned into a movement that supports communities around the world in addressing hate.

The location and registration information for the workshop were still pending at press time; contact Amber Jackson at [ajackson@hearfoundation.com](mailto:ajackson@hearfoundation.com) to receive information.

## Byzantine Catholic Seminary 25th Annual Lecture Focuses on "Nicaea as a Way of Life"



Fr. Khaled Anatolios

Saints Cyril and Methodius Byzantine Catholic Seminary invites the public to attend its 25th annual lecture on Tuesday, May 6 from 7:00-8:30 p.m. via Zoom.

Featured speaker Father Khaled Anatolios will present an interpretation of the Council of Nicaea as a contestation about the lordship of Christ. This interpretation will lead to recommendations for how the Nicene confession can help us to answer the question today of what it means to say that Jesus is Lord.

Fr. Khaled, a priest of the Melkite Catholic Eparchy of Newton (North America), is the John A. O'Brien Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Ind. and a fellow at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute, Jerusalem. His primary field of study is in the history of Christianity, with specific research and training interests in early Christian doctrine, theological method, and Biblical exegesis. A particular focus of his work is the engagement between early Christian theological reflection and

contemporary theological concerns.

A graduate with his Ph.D. from Boston College, Fr. Khaled's most well-known work in systematic theology is *Deification through the Cross, An Eastern Christian Theology of Salvation* (2020) and his best-known scholarly work in the history of Christianity, which makes contributions on the all-important figure of St. Athanasius the Great, is *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (2018). He is also the author of *Feasts for the Kingdom, Sermons for the Liturgical Year* (2023) and the editor of *The Trinity in the Life of the Church* (2014).

The lecture will be streamed live via the seminary's website, [bcs.edu/schedule-of-events](https://bcs.edu/schedule-of-events), and can also be accessed at a later time from archives on the B.C.S. YouTube channel.

## Helping Our Immigrant Neighbors Know Their Rights

By Annie Leech

"Extending a helping hand and a welcoming smile is what we do as Pittsburghers," began the Rev. Liddy Barlow. The occasion was "Protecting Immigrant Rights: A Webinar for Faith Leaders" on March 2, co-sponsored by Christian Associates and the Center for Loving Kindness at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh. The webinar featured Sister Janice Vanderneck of Casa San José and the Rev. Ralph Lowe of Pittsburgh Presbytery.

Casa San José was founded in 2013 by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden as a community center for Pittsburgh's Latino community. The organization provides a variety of resources such as weekly clinics, food pantries, summer camps, community meetings, Know Your Rights sessions, and much more.

With the new administration's focus on immigrant detention and deportation, Casa San José has been active in establishing rapid response teams and in advocating for humane policies. Sister Janice said, "As people of faith, it is more important than ever to understand the laws of this country and the faithful imperative to help our neighbors."



There are a number of ways that people of faith can respond to this call. Worshiping communities must be prepared so they can advocate for all people to be treated with dignity while complying with valid judicial warrants. Recommendations for preparing policies, procedures, and people include:

- Learn about the law. Understand federal laws related to harboring and transporting undocumented immigrants. Know how ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) officers are permitted to act in public areas versus

signposted private areas of your building. Recognize the difference between a judicial warrant and an administrative warrant.

- Adopt a policy of nondiscrimination at your place of worship. Make it known that your church welcomes and helps people in need. Push back against rhetoric that dehumanizes and scapegoats immigrants.
- Share educational materials and host "Know Your Rights" trainings for congregants and community members. Provide referrals to local organizations that provide free legal assistance for immigrants.
- Consider volunteering as an emergency guardian for children whose parents have been detained or deported.

A recording of the webinar and an informational handout with frequently asked questions and links is available at [casp.org/immigration](https://casp.org/immigration). More information and resources can be found at the Casa San José website, [casasanjose.org](https://casasanjose.org).

## Allegheny Health Network Seeks Spiritual Care Volunteers for Palliative Care Patients

Allegheny Health Network is seeking spiritual care volunteers to visit with palliative care patients and their families at five of its Western Pennsylvania hospital locations.

Palliative care is an approach that improves the quality of life for patients and their families facing problems associated with life-threatening illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification, assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, whether they be physical, psychosocial or spiritual.

AHN serves patients of all and no faiths, and volunteers and staff members must be flexible in meeting patients and families where they are on their particular faith journey. Those considering a volunteer position should be willing to attend orientation, training and meetings; to function as a member of



a palliative care team; and to complete simple chart entries under the direction of the spiritual care coordinator.

Applicants must have the ability to navigate hospital corridors either on foot or with an assistive mobility device. Basic computer skills, including email and videoconferencing (Zoom or

Microsoft Teams) are helpful.

AHN will provide required training and will pay for state and federal clearances if you have not already obtained them. For clergy, at least one unit of CPE is required. Volunteers must be up-to-date on all vaccinations and provide a negative tuberculosis test. Locations seeking applicants are Allegheny General, Forbes, Jefferson, West Penn and AHN Wexford hospitals.

For more information, contact Pastor Kim Rapczak, AHN spiritual care coordinator, at 412-738-4650 or [Kimberly.Rapczak@ahn.org](mailto:Kimberly.Rapczak@ahn.org).

To apply online, go to [ahn.org/volunteer-application](http://ahn.org/volunteer-application). Indicate your preferred location and type "palliative care with Pastor Kim" in the "Why did you select Allegheny Health Network?" text box.

## Pittsburgh Prays Continues to Discern Youth Focus



In March, clergy and lay leaders interested in ministry with youth and young adults gathered at the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh Pastoral Center to discern how the Holy Spirit might be directing us to expand our efforts to serve the next generation. We heard from leaders in parishes, in para-church ministries, in sports activities...and, most importantly, we heard from youth and young adults themselves.

This conversation continues on Sunday, July 20 at 7 p.m. Gather with Christians from across the region to pray, to ponder, and to connect, with young people leading the way. If you would like to participate, please RSVP to David Solberg at [dsolberg@diopitt.org](mailto:dsolberg@diopitt.org).

## Fred Rogers Institute Hosts Spring Symposium, Conference

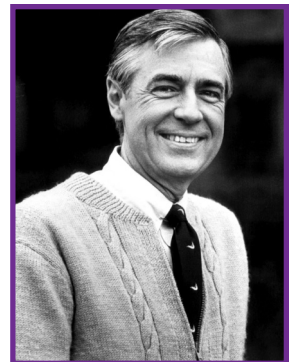
The Fred Rogers Institute will host two events this spring of interest to clergy and educators.

The first, a symposium titled **The Theology of Fred Rogers**, takes place on Wednesday, May 14 from Noon-1:00 p.m. via Zoom. There is no cost to register.

The second event is a two-day conference, **The Work of Fred Rogers: A Cross-Context Conference on Fred's Legacy in Action Today**. This in-person event takes place at the institute's headquarters in Latrobe, Pa. from June 20-21.

Organizers have planned a practice-focused and practice-informed conference featuring sessions from educators and other child-serving professionals. Keynote speakers include Rev. Dr. Clarence E. Wright, the Fred Rogers Institute and Pittsburgh Theological Seminary Fellow in Theology and Ministry, and Mallory Mbalia, Director of Learning and Education at Fred Rogers Productions. Attendees will also hear from five Inquiry Educators about their year-long study in the Fred Rogers Archive.

Two-day registration costs \$300 and closes June 12; continuing education credits are available for both events. For more information, visit [fredrogersinstitute.org/events](http://fredrogersinstitute.org/events).





# GUIDING THE FAITHFUL IN COMPLEX TIMES

## Fishing Differently: Ministry Formation in the Marketplace

*With Sidney S. Williams Jr.*

April 30, 2025; In Person

*Co-sponsored by The United Methodist Foundation of Pennsylvania and The Journey Church, Harrisburg*

## Alzheimer's and Dementia 101: Half-day Workshop for Church Leaders

*With Doreen C. Putnam*

May 7, 2025; In Person

## All God's Children Autism Workshop: Promoting Inclusion of Autistic Children Within Local Churches

*With David Quel*

May 10, 2025; In Person and Online



[www.pts.edu/CE](http://www.pts.edu/CE) 412-924-1346 [ConEd@pts.edu](mailto:ConEd@pts.edu)



## Pittsburgh Pirates Host Faith Night

*"Baseball is about going home, and how hard it is to get there and how driven is our need. It tells us how good home is." – John Sexton*



On Saturday, May 10 at 4:05 p.m., the Pittsburgh Pirates will host their annual Faith Night at PNC Park.

After the Buccos take on the Atlanta Braves, Pirates players and coaches will speak about their faith, sharing stories about how faith has affected them both on and off the field. Group rate tickets are available. For more information, visit [mlb.com/pirates/tickets/specials/faith](http://mlb.com/pirates/tickets/specials/faith).

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On March 17, the seminarians of the Byzantine Catholic Seminary of Ss. Cyril and Methodius hosted the Ecumenical and Nondenominational House of Study from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary for a formation conference. Each seminarian and student shared their vocation journey, along with their perspectives on formation and ministry. Following the conference, the students shared an informal lunch together, followed by a tour of the seminary. Many thanks to seminary rector Fr. Ronald Barusefski for his hospitality!



Interfaith spiritual leaders walk the labyrinth at a We Have to Talk dialogue program in March hosted by the Jewish Community Center. With the theme “Moving from Freeze or Flight to Hope and Action,” the program combined reflection on this essential movement of the spirit with physical movement of our bodies through the labyrinth and a yoga-inspired guided meditation. **Save the date** for the next We Have to Talk program: **Wednesday, May 21 at 11 a.m.** Watch [casp.org/wehavetotalk](http://casp.org/wehavetotalk) for all the details.

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