

# 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)

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 5241, Pittsburgh, PA 15206

Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

Hicks Memorial Chapel - lower level

616 North Highland Avenue - Pittsburgh, PA 15206

*to be one in Christ*

December 2025 / January 2026, Number 5

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

### Christian Associates Welcomes the Presbytery of Shenango

At their September meeting, the Council of Bishops & Judicatory Executives voted unanimously to welcome the Presbytery of Shenango as the 29th member of Christian Associates.

The presbytery, a member of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), includes 43 churches and over 5,000 members in Lawrence and Mercer counties. Strongly mission-minded—the annual New Wilmington Mission Conference has taken place within its bounds for over 100 years—the presbytery engages in mission partnerships with Sudan, South Sudan, Egypt, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic.



Left to right: Bishop Larry Kulick, President of the Christian Associates Council of Bishops & Judicatory Executives; the Rev. Beth Creekpau of the Presbytery of Shenango; the Rev. Liddy Barlow, Executive Minister of Christian Associates

Shenango Presbytery has adopted an innovative shared leadership structure. Instead of a single Executive Presbyter, their leadership team consists of Co-Directors of Ministry Pastor Jim Moose and the Rev. Jim Mohr; Director of Operations the Rev. Glenn Hink; Director of Presbytery Advancement the Rev. Beth Creekpau; and Stated Clerk Elder John C. Reed.

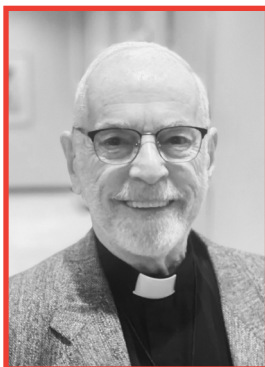
Noting the diversity of Christians at Westminster College, where he serves as chaplain, Rev. Mohr said, “As a Presbytery we are called to reach out to the church that surrounds us.” That outreach led the presbytery to Christian Associates. Welcome aboard!

### Member Churches Re-Organize and Choose New Leaders

Two Christian Associates members have adopted new structures and selected new leaders, bringing more new faces to our Council of Bishops & Judicatory Executives.

#### North American Lutheran Church

Growing in numbers, the Mid-



The Rev. James F. Neal

and congregations.

Northeast Mission District of the North American Lutheran Church has re-organized as the Mid-Northeast Mission Region. In addition to a regional Dean, the Region now also has six District Deans who can assist in supporting pastors

The Region elected the Rev. James F. Neal as its next Dean at its October convocation. Over forty years of active ministry, Pastor Neal served churches in Trafford, Monongahela, Girard, Kittanning, Ford City, and Freeport; since his retirement in 2011, he has done interim ministry in Sarver and Butler.

“I believe Christian unity is the ongoing fulfillment of our Lord’s High Priestly Prayer he prayed in John 17:21,” Pastor Neal said.

#### United Church of Christ

On January 1, the four United Church of Christ Conferences in Pennsylvania will merge to form a single new entity: the Keystone Conference.

“I am thrilled that we are going to be able to work together in the new Keystone Conference with a larger staff, more people, and more resources to help serve our churches better,” said

current Penn West Conference Minister the Rev. David Ackerman.

The Rev. Dr. Carrie Call will serve as Transitional Executive Conference Minister for the new Keystone Conference.

She has served as Conference Minister of the Penn Central Conference since 2019, and previously served Lancaster Theological Seminary, and Saint Mary’s College, Notre Dame, Indiana, where she was Director of the Office for Civic and Social Engagement.



The Rev. Dr. Carrie Call

“I believe we are called by Jesus to live in peace among ourselves as spiritual kin,” Rev. Call said. “We are not there yet, but the call remains, always.”

# REFLECTIONS ALONG THE WAY

Dear friends,

As I spend time with clergy colleagues from all the different traditions that are part of Christian Associates, I notice that each church has its particular vocabulary: a notable word or two that they use much more often than other Christians do. For Methodists, it's "prevenient." For Orthodox, definitely "theotokos." And when I'm around Catholics, a word has been standing out to me lately: *fraternity*.

Bishop Larry Kulick has served as the President of our Council of Bishops & Judicatory Executives this year. When we've spoken about the challenge of welcoming so many newcomers into the Council, he's recommended organizing some social time so we can enjoy fraternity with one another. Or, we'll have an event, like the Nicaea 1700 celebration, and he'll remark on the excellent spirit of fraternity in the room.

This word, "fraternity," startles me every time. I was formed by a Christian tradition that never uses the word at all, outside of keg party hosts on college campuses. Since my denomination ordains people of all genders, "fraternity" would be an awkward descriptor for the relationships enjoyed among our leaders. We speak of collegiality, friendship ... but fraternity? Not so much.

And yet, there's something in "fraternity" that gets to the heart of our connection as Christians. Jesus declared that all who do God's will are his brothers; in the book of Acts, Paul and Peter both use "brothers" as the default collective noun for the group of believers. In the epistles, both Romans and Hebrews, Christians are instructed to live in relationships of *philadelphia*, brotherly love.

Modern translations often expand these references to read "brothers and sisters" to make the meaning clear: whatever our gender, our relationship to one another is that of siblings, not mere acquaintances, colleagues, or even friends. Siblings have a closer kinship. They share a bond that cannot be erased even by deep disagreement or clashing personalities. Siblings have a shared history; they grow from the same roots; they have mutual responsibility. At best, they can accommodate one another's quirks and foibles, recognizing that despite their sometimes significant differences, they share a connection that nothing can sever.

I remember clowning in the church choir loft with my best friend Liz during Junior Choir rehearsals in elementary school. We were learning this song:

*"Let us love one another  
Like a sister or a brother  
Let us love one another  
Like children of the Lord."*

Whenever we sang, "like a sister or a brother," Liz would pretend to punch me on the shoulder, and I would try to pinch her on the arm ... because in our own experience, that was how siblings usually loved each other. Conflict between siblings is well attested in the Bible too, of course. Sibling rivalry and jealousy may help explain the divisions that plague the church today. But just as the Bible offers stories of sibling bitterness and violence, it also offers stories of sibling reconciliation.

Despite our separations, reconciliation is possible for us as Christian siblings as well. Like Joseph, we might turn to our estranged siblings and say, simply and clearly, "I am your brother." We can name this relationship, honor its responsibilities, and move toward one another in love.

And after that? Well, perhaps the best word for what we will share is "fraternity."

Your sister (!) in Christ,



The Rev. Liddy Barlow  
Executive Minister



Photo by Brian Cohen



Rev. Liddy Barlow (at right) and her sister  
Sarah-Mary in 1988



## Christian Associates Celebrates Nicaea 1700

### Devotional Book Now Available for Download or Purchase

Nearly 80 people from 21 different church bodies gathered on November 18 for a celebration many centuries in the making! Christian Associates' "We Believe" celebration marked the 1700th anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea with song, prayer, Scripture reading, and discussion, culminating with a unison confession of the Nicene Creed.

The event also featured the launch of Christian Associates' latest publication. *We Believe: A Devotional Book for Nicaea 1700* contains twenty-eight reflections from bishops, pastors, deacons, and theologians from all over Southwest Pennsylvania. The selections, as varied as their authors, each include concluding questions for group discussion and individual reflection.



Many of the book's contributing authors attended the release party for *We Believe: A Devotional Book for Nicaea 1700*

Even if you missed the event, you can still participate in the celebration! Printed copies of *We Believe* are available for \$12 (plus shipping). A free PDF download is

also available. You might read it for personal devotion or share it with a church group for discussion. It also makes a great stocking stuffer! Visit [casp.org/nicaea](http://casp.org/nicaea) to place your order.

Christian Associates thanks Bishop Mark Eckman and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh for hosting this event at their Pastoral Center, and members of Praise Nation Pittsburgh for providing special music.

At the end of the evening, many joked about doing this again in 1,700 years. But the cause of unity will not wait. We look forward to meeting again much sooner than that! In the meantime, we are grateful for the joy we felt and continue to pray for unity in faith and love.



"In these sacred words, we find a stalwart beacon of truth that has illumined the very path of salvation for generations, both past and present, and those yet to come."

-His Grace Bishop IRINEJ, Diocese of Washington-New York and Eastern America, Serbian Orthodox Church

"For African Americans, the Nicene Creed is not a relic of empire but a declaration of liberation. To confess that Christ is "of one substance with the Father" is to confess that no human hierarchy can nullify the dignity of those whom God has joined to Himself."

-The Rev. Dr. Dale Snyder, Bethel AME Church

"To say 'I believe' together in one voice is a declaration that the love of the Triune God is stronger than the forces of division."

-Bishop Larry Kulick, Catholic Diocese of Greensburg

"In a time marked by division and fragmentation, war and strife, hyper-partisanship and suspicion of the other, the church is right to pause and recover our shared creedal affirmation, remembering that some 1700 years ago faithful Christians wrestled within their own context, circumstances, and competing theological stances."

-The Rev. Jessica McClure Archer, Pittsburgh Presbytery

## Thank You to Our 2025 Supporters!

The generous support of individuals, congregations, corporations, and foundations makes our work possible. Many thanks to each of these donors for their commitment to Christian unity! We look forward to including your name next year.

### John 17 Society "that they may all be one" \$250 or more

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\* Indicates a member of the Circle of Unity monthly giving program

This list includes donations made between November 16, 2024 and November 15, 2025. Donations made after November 15 will be recognized at the end of 2026. We have made every effort to ensure the accuracy of this list and apologize in advance if any names were omitted, miscategorized, or misspelled. Please contact our office if you discover an error and we will publish a correction.

## Keep the Spirit of Unity Strong Through Your Support

*"We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty ..."*

Together, a room full of Southwest Pennsylvania Christians lifted their voices to declare our common faith. Across differences in tradition, background, and experience, we named that our most essential identity is the one we share as followers of Jesus Christ.

1700 years after the first Council of Nicaea, Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania is carrying on its legacy of ecumenical ministry. We bring together Christians who are Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant; urban, suburban, and rural; progressive and conservative and everything in between. What's

more, we bring Christians into dialogue and shared work with our neighbors from civic, community, and interfaith organizations.

The first Council of Nicaea was able to rely on Emperor Constantine's imperial treasury to support its needs, but today we have no gilded coffers to fund ecumenical endeavors. Instead, Christian Associates looks to generous donors like you to make our ministry possible.

Will you show your support for Christian unity by becoming a partner in this essential ministry? Your support ensures our work can continue in 2025 and beyond. You may use the enclosed envelope to send your gift today. Checks

may be made payable to Christian Associates and mailed to:

**Christian Associates of Southwest  
Pennsylvania  
PO Box 5241  
Pittsburgh, PA 15206**

You can also give online at [casp.org/donate](http://casp.org/donate), where you can also learn more about our Circle of Unity monthly giving program and our John 17 Society donor recognition.

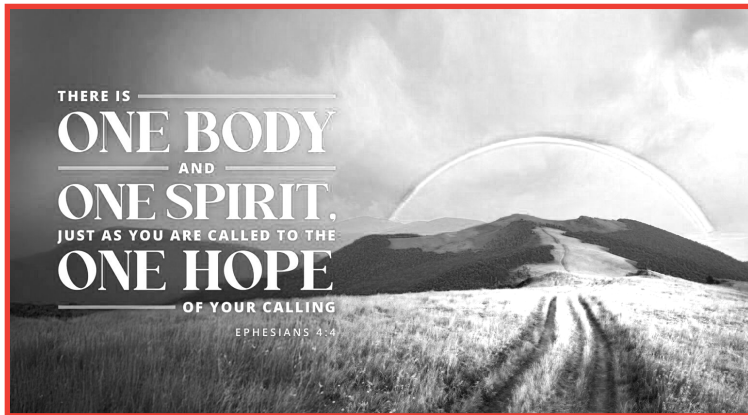
Thank you for keeping the spirit of Nicaea alive through your support of Christian Associates. Together, we are one holy catholic and apostolic church!



### Celebrate the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity



### "Hands Together" Event Encourages Partnership Between Churches, Community Organizations to Address Hunger



Each year, Christians around the world celebrate the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The week begins on the Feast of the Confession of St. Peter on January 18 and concludes on the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul on January 25.

The Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and the Holy See's Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity selected Ephesians 4:4 as this year's focus scripture: *"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling."* Reflections on the theme, suggested liturgies, and promotional materials are available from the Graymoor Ecumenical & Interreligious Institute, [geii.org](http://geii.org).

Christian Associates would be glad to promote Week of Prayer for Christian Unity activities in our region through our e-newsletter, *Unity n'At*; please send details to us by email and we'll help spread the word.

The shelves in many church food pantries are emptier than usual, due to increased need, rising costs, and threats to public benefits.

These challenges offer fresh opportunities for creative partnership. Churches with an abundance of resources and volunteers can provide support for churches in need. Churches can build new bridges with local public schools and community organizations. If we put our hands together, we can meet our community's need.

Join Christian Associates on **Thursday, January 29** at **St. Paul of the Cross Spiritual Center** (148 Monastery Avenue, Pittsburgh 15203) for **Hands Together**, an afternoon of connection, cooperation, and camaraderie designed to help churches build essential partnerships for providing basic needs.

The event begins with a prayer service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity at 1:00 p.m. At 1:30, we invite churches located in high-need areas that host food pantries or similar ministries to participate in a time of networking, best-practice sharing, and conversation about overcoming common challenges.

Then at 2:30, we invite churches that have an abundance of volunteers or resources to share to join us. Connect with a sister congregation that needs your help to serve its neighborhood. Learn how you can partner with schools and community groups. With our hands together, we will build the partnerships that can help every community thrive.

To learn more and to register for the event, visit [casp.org/handstogether](http://casp.org/handstogether).



## Reckoning with Antisemitism as Christians Offers Text Studies, Grant Opportunities, and More

A new year of the “Reckoning with Antisemitism as Christians” project is well underway. Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania and the Holocaust Center of Pittsburgh are ready to support you and your congregation in understanding this ancient hatred and moving toward deeper relationship with our Jewish neighbors.

The options are fully customizable to meet the needs of clergy and congregations. Your own Reckoning journey might include any (or all!) of these options:

- **Scheduling a Dismantling Antisemitism 101 for Christians workshop**  
Bring a Holocaust Center of Pittsburgh educator to your church to share an interactive, discussion-based introduction to antisemitism, customized for Christian audiences.
- **Attending a text or topic study**  
Join us on Wednesday, January 21 at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary for



*Christians gathered in October to explore the Reckoning with Antisemitism program's options for 2025-6.*

a conversation on Romans 2:17-29 with Professor Rafael Rodriguez. Watch for a discussion on Holy Week later this spring.

- **Participating in the preaching challenge**  
Give a sermon that reckons with ways that the scripture has been interpreted in anti-Jewish ways and reimagines readings of these texts that help us better love our neighbors. We'll publish these sermons this spring.

- **Inviting a guest speaker**  
Generations speakers from the Holocaust Center of Pittsburgh are children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors telling their survivor relative's story. REACH speakers from the 10.27 Healing partnership are Family members and survivors of the October 27, 2018 synagogue shooting sharing their firsthand experiences
- **Applying for a micro-grant**  
This project includes a pool of grant funds that will be awarded to church-synagogue partnerships for shared programs! You might plan a pulpit exchange, a book study, a covered-dish dinner, or an interfaith Passover Seder.

To learn more about these options, to join our email list, and to RSVP for programs, visit [casp.org/reckoning](http://casp.org/reckoning). Want to talk it over? We are happy to plan a conversation about the unique needs of your church.

### Classified Advertisement

#### Musician for Hire

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### Pittsburgh Crèche Returns



Christian leaders from the Pittsburgh area blessed the Pittsburgh Crèche in Steel Plaza on November 21, inaugurating the annual display of this holiday landmark. The replica of the nativity scene at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome will be open around the clock until mid-January.

Approximately \$70,000 is required each year to maintain and display the crèche. An endowment fund at the Pittsburgh Foundation is helping ensure this inspirational display can continue in many years to come. To make your gift, visit [pittsburghfoundation.org/creche](http://pittsburghfoundation.org/creche).



#### Winterville 2026

Get ready to escape the everyday and dive into an unforgettable winter weekend retreat! On January 16-18, 2026, we are hosting two amazing camps with a powerful, unified theme, "Like a Tree" (Jeremiah 17:5-8)

Winterville 2026 (Grades 2-8)

Winterville High (Grades 9-12)

Cost: \$150 per student (\$35 AMC discount available).



Join the Music and Worship Leaders Retreat at Laurelville

January 16-18, 2026

941 Laurelville Lane

Mount Pleasant, PA 15666

We're focusing on intergenerational worship with keynote speaker Natalie Frisk. We will have all sessions in the new Gathering Place.

For more information contact call 724-423-2056 or email [program@laurelville.org](mailto:program@laurelville.org)  
[www.laurelville.org](http://www.laurelville.org)



## 19th Annotation Retreat in Daily Life

Develop the skills and confidence to guide others through the Ignatian  
*19th Annotation Retreat in Daily Life.*

This program (offered via Zoom) includes:

- Awareness and insight into each of the dynamics of all four weeks in the Ignatian Exercises;
- In-depth work with Discernment of Spirits, the Rules of Discernment and Ignatian Decision making;
- Review of scriptures appropriate for each of the four weeks; and
- Insight into all of the Pivotal Meditations of the Exercises.

February 20-21, March 20-21, & April 17-18

visit our website at <https://www.wvis.org/training> for additional details or email [exec.director@wvis.org](mailto:exec.director@wvis.org).



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## Companions in Ignatian Discernment: *Am I Called to the Ministry of Spiritual Leadership or Spiritual Direction?*

*With Dr. Carolyn Nickerson and the Rev. Joseph Hedden*

Saturdays, Jan. 10-Feb. 14, 2026, 9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. ET

A synchronous online course designed and led by Pneuma Institute,  
delivered through PTS Continuing Education

This program is designed for lay or ordained persons sensing a call to the ministry of spiritual leadership, companionship, and/or direction. In this 6-week experience, participants will come together virtually for a communal journey of experiential learning and prayerful individual discernment of their call.



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### Looking Ahead to Opportunities in 2026: Save These Dates!

*and watch for more information in upcoming editions of The Call*

- Tuesday, January 13 • Thursday, March 5 • Wednesday, May 6: **We Have to Talk** interfaith field trips: details coming soon at [casp.org/wehavetotalk](http://casp.org/wehavetotalk)
- Wednesday, January 21: **Reckoning with Antisemitism Text Study** with Professor Rafael Rodriguez at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary (see page 5)
- Thursday, January 29: **Hands Together**, St. Paul of the Cross Retreat Center (see page 5)
- Saturday, March 14: **Bread for the World Hunger Advocacy Workshop**, Kearns Spirituality Center
- Thursday-Friday, April 9-10: **International Association of Women Ministers retreat** with Grace Killian, Sherwood Oaks
- Friday, May 8: **Pittsburgh Pastoral Care Conference** with keynote speakers The Rev. Dr. John Wallace and Dr. Debbie Moon, Sts. John and Paul Catholic Church

#### Need to Change Your Address?

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