

Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania

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

The Call . . .

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Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

Hicks Memorial Chapel - lower level

616 North Highland Avenue - Pittsburgh, PA 15206

to be one in Christ



February/March 2026, Number 1

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

Rising to the Challenge: Bread for the World Workshop Equips You to Fight Hunger

For Christians who take seriously the call to feed the hungry, this is a difficult time. Food insecurity is on the rise, locally and across the globe. Federal legislation has put anti-hunger programs at risk. But even now, people of faith can be part of the solution: not only by our acts of mercy, but also by working for justice and raising our voices in the halls of power. Together, we have what it takes to meet this moment.

On **Saturday, March 14**, the Southwest Pennsylvania Bread for the World Team invites you to our 2026 Hunger Advocacy Workshop: **“Rising to the Challenge: Addressing Food Insecurity Today.”**

An all-star lineup of speakers will help us understand the complexities and possibilities of our current environment:



Secretary Redding; Rev. Taylor

- Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture Russell Redding will join us to explore the impact of HR 1 (“the Big, Beautiful Bill”) on hunger in our commonwealth
- The Rev. Heather Taylor, Managing Director of Bread for the World will share the organization’s strategies for advocacy and key legislative priorities.

- A panel of local experts will explore the shape of hunger in our own neighborhoods. We will welcome Lisa Scales, President & CEO of the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank; Ann Sanders, Director of Public Benefits Policy & Programs at Just Harvest; and Dawn Plummer, Director of the Pennsylvania Food Policy Council.

The workshop takes place at Kearns Spirituality Center, 9000 Babcock Blvd, Allison Park 15101, hosted by the Sisters of Divine Providence. Admission is free. Registration begins at 9 a.m., and the workshop concludes at 1 p.m., with an optional lunch to follow. Sign up now at bit.ly/bread2026.

People of Faith Gather Weekly to Pray for Justice for Immigrants



Through the heat of summer and the snows of winter, faithful people have gathered each Friday morning at 8:30 a.m. on the sidewalk outside 3000 Sidney Street on

Pittsburgh’s South Side: the regional headquarters of Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Sr. Janice Vanderneck and Sr. Barbara Finch of the Sisters of St. Joseph

of Baden and Mimi Darragh of Pax Christi launched the weekly interfaith prayer vigils in August 2025. Each week, dozens of people, sometimes well over 100, participate.

The vigils are a time of prayer, not a partisan rally. Participants stay on the public sidewalk, careful to obey the law and keep the peace. Leadership rotates among churches and organizations of many faith traditions: Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Baha’i, and Unitarian Universalist groups have planned and led the prayers in recent months.

After prayers, songs, and remarks, those present form a single line, standing shoulder to shoulder and facing the ICE building for a time of silent prayer for those inside: both immigrants

temporarily held there on their way to longer-term detention elsewhere, and the ICE employees.

“For me, in this situation, it’s not good enough for me to pray in my home, but I need to witness that prayer in public,” said Sr. Barbara Finch. “You become complicit in injustice if you don’t speak up.”

“I have not experienced this outpouring of cooperation for a long time,” she continued. “Everyone realizes how important it is for all of us to pitch in and do something.”

If your church or organization is interested in taking the lead at an upcoming vigil, contact Sister Finch: b.a.finch@att.net.

REFLECTIONS ALONG THE WAY

Dear friends,

My family often takes a short trip in January when our kids have a few days off school; this year, we went to Los Angeles for Disneyland and the beach. While Pittsburgh froze in single-digit temperatures, we took off our sweatshirts to feel the sunshine (*remember sunshine?*) on our skin.

The same weekend that we spent dipping our toes in the Pacific Ocean, clergy from across the country heeded the call to come to Minneapolis. Singing and marching, listening to experiences of immigrants and their neighbors, praying with their feet, my colleagues stood for justice while I was standing in line for Dumbo the Flying Elephant. When Alex Pretti, ICU nurse and American citizen, was shot in the back, I was at the Happiest Place on Earth.

The juxtaposition made me feel flat-footed, off-key, and inadequate. To be caught in frivolity at such a time made me wonder: do I have the commitment, the energy, the focus that this hour demands?

Then I remembered the afternoon I spent at UPMC Presbyterian Hospital in the days that followed the shooting at Tree of Life Synagogue in 2018. I was among a group of faith leaders called in to debrief and console the medical residents who had experienced the trauma of that day in the emergency room.

One of the lead residents told us that he worked an overnight shift on October 26. On the morning of October 27, he clocked out at 8 a.m. and went home. He was fast asleep when the shooting happened, and woke up in late afternoon. He felt ashamed: he feared he had abandoned his colleagues when they needed him most.

But no, the experienced doctors in the room said. His work in the hours prior to the shooting had allowed his colleagues to come in that morning well rested and prepared to serve. It takes everyone, each taking their own turn and doing their own work, to meet the challenge of hard times.

In the emergency room, in all the emergencies our nation and our neighborhoods face today: we need each other. This moment is too big for any one of us to face on their own. We have to take this one in shifts. We have to recognize that no single person brings all the gifts necessary to make the whole world turn toward wholeness, justice, and peace. We have to honor rhythms of work and rest. We have to extend grace to one another, and to ourselves.

At the burning bush, God shared the divine name with Moses: "I AM WHO I AM." Or, alternatively, "I AM WHO I WILL BE." Or, as I've heard it interpreted, "*I will be what the future requires.*" It is not up to any human creature to be everything that the coming days demand. Instead, we entrust the future to God's hands, and take our own small parts in the work God gives us each to do.

Alone, none of us can meet the moment. Together, in coordination, one picking up the song as another takes a breath, we can do more. And when we all join in God's work, we can walk boldly into the unknown future, trusting beyond our present sight that the victory is already won.

Your sister in Christ,



The Rev. Liddy Barlow
Executive Minister



Photo by Brian Cohen



Pittsburghers gather outside the Immigration & Customs Enforcement office on the South Side for a weekly vigil.

Bower Hill Community Church Hosts Series on Future of Congregational Life

This Spring, Bower Hill Community Church (PCUSA) in Mount Lebanon celebrates its 75th anniversary by hosting **Faith Forward: The Future of Congregational Life**, a series of lectures and discussions on the challenges and opportunities facing religious institutions in the decades ahead.

This series is co-sponsored by Christian Associates and by Pittsburgh Presbytery.



Dr. Ryan Burge

The series begins March 11 with **Dr. Ryan Burge**, an American Baptist minister and political science lecturer at Washington University in St. Louis whose

analysis of religious affiliation data has been featured in national outlets such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *POLITICO*. Burge is also the author of five books, including *The Nones: Where They Came From, Who They Are, and Where They Are Going*,

which explores the dramatic rise of non-religious Americans and offers explanations for this seismic cultural shift.



Dr. Andrew Root

On April 22, **Dr. Andrew Root**, a professor at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, will speak on maintaining faith amidst modern challenges including the fragility and

more contested nature of today's belief systems. Root is the author of the six-volume *Ministry in a Secular Age* book series as well as *When Church Stops Working: A Future for Your Congregation Beyond More Money, Programs and Innovation*.

The series concludes on May 13 with a panel discussion featuring three religious leaders with ties to Western Pennsylvania, moderated by Christian Associates' Executive Minister, Rev. Liddy Barlow. Participants include:

- **Dr. Gregory D. Jones**, adjunct professor of theology at Duquesne University. Jones' work focuses on the theological meaning of gaming and the intersection of religion, media, and popular culture.
- **The Rev. Dr. Tracy Keenan**, recently retired missional presbyter of New Castle Presbytery (Delaware/Eastern Maryland). Keenan's work involved helping congregations to strengthen mission, outreach, and social justice ministries.
- **Eric A. Schaffer**, past president of Rodef Shalom Congregation, Pittsburgh. Schaffer is helping guide the merger of Rodef Shalom with fellow Pittsburgh congregation Temple Sinai.

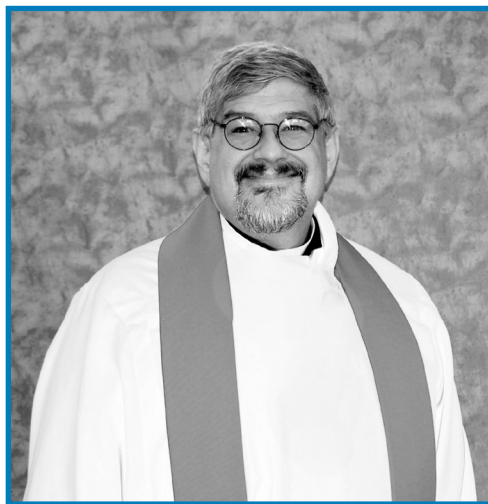
All events take place at Cefalo's Banquet and Event Center, Carnegie, from 4-8 p.m. The cost of \$35 per person per event includes dinner. For more information and to register, please visit bowerhillchurch.org/speakersseries.

The Rev. Maurice Frontz joins Christian Associates as Program and Operations Associate

The Rev. Maurice Frontz began work as Christian Associates' part-time Program and Operations Associate this past fall. Also known as "Chip," he is no stranger to Christian Associates, having served for several years as a proxy representative to the Council of Bishops and Judicatory Executives and on the Theology and Education Committee.

He continues his service as pastor of St Stephen Lutheran Church (NALC) in Scott Township and is also a part-time guest lecturer in liturgy for the North American Lutheran Seminary.

Rev. Frontz's work includes assistance to the Executive Minister in day-to-day operations and communications of Christian Associates, as well as representing the organization at many judicatory and community functions and taking lead responsibility for certain aspects of the Strategic Plan. He was



The Rev. Maurice Frontz

instrumental in the conception and execution of Christian Associates' recent devotional publication on Nicaea 1700 and its companion launch event. He can be reached at mfrontz@casp.org.

"I am so excited to welcome Chip to our team," said The Rev. Liddy Barlow, Executive Minister. "His keen insight and passion for ecumenical endeavors will help us continue in our expanding current ministries and develop new areas of focus."

It has been over a decade since Christian Associates has expanded its permanent staff. This new investment of energy can only be made possible by an equal investment of resources on the part of our generous supporters. We are grateful to all who made gifts in our year-end appeal, and we encourage you to contribute today to show your support for the essential ministries of ecumenical fellowship and community connection. Visit casp.org/donate.

Hands Together Event Builds Connections to Address Human Needs

The below-freezing temperatures outside couldn't diminish the warmth and spirit felt on Thursday, January 29 at St Paul of the Cross Spiritual Center in South Side Slopes, as over 45 people from across the region gathered for "Hands Together," an afternoon of prayer, storytelling, and networking to address food insecurity and other basic needs in Southwest Pennsylvania neighborhoods and communities.

Co-sponsored by Christian Associates, Mary Queen of Peace Parish, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, and Sunset Hills Presbyterian Church, the event convened churches seeking opportunities to serve, as well as churches and organizations seeking resources to help support their food pantries or other direct ministries.

The afternoon began in the Retreat Center's chapel with an ecumenical prayer service honoring the 2026 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and featuring a sermon by The Rev. Noah Evans of St. Paul's Episcopal Church.

Following a Week of Prayer for Christian Unity worship service, those with gifts to give and those with direct ministries formed two groups to share their challenges, successes, and opportunities. Upon reuniting, the participants engaged in "speed dating," sharing tables to connect and brainstorm. By the time several rounds of conversation had ended, each person had met others who shared their passion for providing for those in need, and had planted the seeds for future partnership.

One attendee commented, "I loved the worship, the roundtable discussions, and the opportunity to meet, connect, and listen. Hearing about the needs and resources within the body of Christ was both inspiring and hopeful."

Another attendee returned to his Presbyterian church and shared about an Episcopal church's ministry to people experiencing poverty and homelessness. Within 24 hours, his parishioners had collected five bags full of coats and over \$800 to purchase more warm clothes for people in need. That's Hands Together in action!

Watch future editions of *The Call* to learn when the next Hands Together event will take place.



Scenes from Hand Together, including preacher Rev. Noah Evans (bottom right) and organizer Meghan Larsen-Reidy (top center).

Share your Sermon on Reckoning with Antisemitism

The preached word matters! Preaching shapes its hearers: widening their understanding, strengthening their connection to God's word, and expanding their empathy. When Christians preachers reckon honestly with antisemitism and move toward love and respect for our Jewish neighbors, their words can affect their whole community.

A key call to action of the "Reckoning with Antisemitism as Christians" project, Christian Associates' partnership with the Holocaust Center of Pittsburgh, is the invitation for Christian clergy to bring their reckoning to the pulpit. Share a sermon that honestly faces the ways that Scripture has been interpreted in anti-Jewish ways, and reimagines readings of these texts that help us better love our neighbors.

Christian Associates is collecting these sermons this spring to publish them as the next volume of *The Word in Our Voices*, our series of collected writings by preachers in Southwest

Pennsylvania. Our hope is not only to offer Christians examples of preaching that honestly engages the church's complex history around antisemitism, but also to show our Jewish neighbors the faithful and compassionate work that their Christian neighbors are doing.

Please contribute your voice! Visit www.casp.org/reckoning#sermons to read more about possible sermon topics, emphases or directions. Then submit your sermon (or essay, newsletter article, etc.) as a text file, or as an audio or video recording, preferably before April 20.

Many have already attended one of our events to workshop potential sermon topics or to hear from local scholars who are doing the work of reckoning by their fresh interpretation of New Testament



Professor Rafael Rodriguez leads a Reckoning with Antisemitism as Christians text study on Romans 2 in January.

texts. Our next event is scheduled for **February 24** at 10 a.m., a Zoom conversation on **Preaching in Holy Week** with Pastor Kimberly van Driel of First English Lutheran Church in Butler and Father James Podlesny of Saint Cecilia Parish in Whitney and Sacred Heart Parish in Youngstown. Register at casp.org/reckoning#textstudies.



Special Thanks to Our Judicatory Supporters

Christian Associates is deeply grateful to all our member judicatories, and we wish to offer particular recognition to the church bodies which contributed to our financial needs in 2025:

Allegheny Union Baptist Association
Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh
Archdiocese of Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania,
Orthodox Church in America
Beaver-Butler Presbytery, Presbyterian Church (USA)
Bruderhof Communities of Southwest Pennsylvania
Byzantine Catholic Archeparchy of Pittsburgh
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Pennsylvania
Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh
Kiskiminetas Presbytery, Presbyterian Church (USA)
Metropolis of Pittsburgh, Greek Orthodox Church
Mid-Northeast Mission Region, North American
Lutheran Church
Penn West Conference, United Church of Christ

Pittsburgh Presbytery, Presbyterian Church (USA)
Redstone Presbytery, Presbyterian Church (USA)
Roman Catholic Diocese of Greensburg
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Shenango Presbytery, Presbyterian Church (USA)
Southwestern PA Synod, Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America
Third Episcopal District, African Methodist
Episcopal Church
Washington Presbytery, Presbyterian Church (USA)
Western Pennsylvania Conference, United
Methodist Church
Western Pennsylvania Division, Salvation Army

We know judicatories have many important financial priorities, and we are grateful to these church bodies for their commitment to Christian Unity. If you see your judicatory's name on the list, please express your appreciation to your bishop or judicatory executive.

Symposium Honors Pioneering Black Catholic Priest



St Paul of the Cross Retreat Center in South Side Slopes will host **“On This Holy Mountain: Tolton: A Story of Hope,”** from March 2-4, 2026.

Co-presented by the Tolton Center for Spirituality, the event focuses on the life and ministry of Father Augustus Tolton, who escaped from slavery to become the first recognized African American Roman Catholic priest in the United States. The symposium will be

a call to prayer, reflection, and courageous conversation on how his journey of perseverance continues to inspire hope, especially today.

Speakers include Bishop Joseph N. Perry, Retired Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago and Diocesan Postulator for Father Tolton’s Cause for Canonization; Dr. Shannen Dee Williams, historian and author; Dr. Ansel Augustine, acclaimed author and leader in Black Catholic ministry, and Dr. Anne Chrzan, expert in catechesis in spiritual formation.

For more information and to register, visit stpaulsretreatcenter-pittsburgh.org or call the center at (412) 381-7676.

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Cantate Usquam Pilgrim Singers Help Congregations Lift Voices in Song

Cantate Usquam means “sing anywhere,” and this group of volunteers supported by Lutheran Campus Ministries and Calvary Episcopal Church is ready to do just that! The mission of the Cantate Usquam Pilgrim Singers is to bring music to churches that don’t have choirs or the resources to sing at their regular services.

The Cantate Usquam Pilgrim Singers are led by musicians who have experience leading congregations and choirs in singing. The group will work with you to sing hymns and music from your tradition and can sing choir pieces for a prelude, offertory, or communion—though their participation is done from congregant seating, not up front. Cantate Usquam volunteers love to sing a capella but can also use available instruments.

The group is now available for dates in 2026, excluding Holy Week or Easter. To learn more, contact Michael Salmon (oriolefish@gmail.com / 904-718-7622) or Penny Anderson (penny_anderson@fastmail.fm / 412-310-9167).

Local Pastor and Interfaith Leader Participates in Vatican Summit

Grassroots activists from across the world brought the cries of the poor to Vatican City in October for the Fifth World Meeting of Popular Movements (WMPM). In the mix—and one of only four African Americans at the meeting—was Pittsburgh’s own Rev. Dr. B. De Neice Welch, who served as a delegate to the WMPM representing the Gamaliel Network.

Meeting at Spin Time Labs, a former palace that is now a center for community-led social services, the delegates shared their experiences working for peace and justice in their own communities. Many shared poignant stories about how the decisions of powerful nations (including the United States) cause suffering to ordinary people. “It was disturbing to be an American in this setting,” Dr. Welch said. With delegates coming from across the globe, differences in culture, work style, and language could be frustrating. “My own bias rose up as every meeting, every meal, every gathering was in a different language, but I realized my privilege had



Rev. Dr. De Neice Welch in Rome

shown up in a preference for my native language of English,” Dr. Welch said. “It was a new experience to think of myself in a privileged manner.”

The event culminated with an address from Pope Leo XIV, who pledged to continue the late Pope Francis’s vision for WMPM, focusing on the rights to land, lodging, and labor (*Tierra, Techo, y Trabajo*) for the people of the

world. Afterward, participants had a brief opportunity to meet the Pope. “I managed to tell him I was from America, and he smiled at me as he shook my hand,” Dr. Welch said.

While most of their time together was in meetings, the delegates did get to visit some of Rome’s sights. “We were able to visit St. Mary Maggiore, where Pope Francis is buried, and we were able to pass through a holy door there and one at the Vatican,” Dr. Welch said. “The opulence of both religious sites was in stark contrast to the number of homeless people sleeping within the gates and on the steps in St. Peter’s Square.”

Returning to Pittsburgh, Dr. Welch serves as Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network (PIIN), a local Gamaliel Network affiliate that advocates for social justice in southwest Pennsylvania. She retired at the end of 2025 from her longtime ministry at Bidwell United Presbyterian Church. For more about PIIN, visit piinpa.org.

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The Rev. Dr. Graham Standish, Executive Director

SUPPORTING TODAY'S CHURCH LEADERS

Register now to join us for the following events!



Albright-Deering Lectures

Called and Ordained: Celebrating 70 Years of Women's Ordination in the Methodist Tradition

With the Rev. Stephanie York Arnold and the Rev. Emily Nelms Chastain

March 3, 2026, 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m., In Person and Online, Free

Co-sponsored by the Western Pennsylvania Conference of The United Methodist Church



Kelso Lecture

The Evidence of Faith: Resistance, Resilience, and the Road to Liberation

With the Rev. William H. Lamar IV

March 12, 2026, 6:00 p.m., In-Person, at Mt. Ararat Baptist Church, and Online, Free

A concert by the Hampton University Concert Choir will follow the Kelso Lecture.



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Quick Takes: Ecumenical News at a Glance

- The **Baptist Ministers Conference of Pittsburgh and Vicinity** plans an ecumenical service Monday, March 16 at 11 a.m. Bishop Marvin Moreland, Jr. of the First Jurisdiction Western Pennsylvania Church of God in Christ will preach.
- Invite ecumenism to your pulpit! **Rev. Liddy Barlow** is available to preach, teach, or bring greetings at your church this year. All honoraria go directly to the mission of Christian Associates. Reserve your Sunday today by emailing lbarlow@casp.org.
- The **International Association of Women Ministers** plans a spring retreat Thursday, April 9-Friday, April 10 at Sherwood Oaks, 100 Norman Drive, Cranberry Twp 16066, led by Rev. Grace Killian, exploring the Lord's Prayer with the theme "Living the Kin-dom." Visit bit.ly/LAWMretreat2026 to sign up.
- **Pittsburgh FRIENDS** is hosting monthly prayer gatherings for unity at Story Collective Church, 4117 Liberty Ave. Pittsburgh 15224, at 11 a.m. on March 12, April 9, and May 14.
- Rev. Dr. Kimberly Wagner of Princeton Theological Seminary returns to our region as the keynote lecturer for the **Oreon E. Scott Lectures**, April 20-21 at First Christian Church, 615 E. Beau St, Washington 15301. The topic is "Trauma, Ministry, and Preaching in these Changing Times." Sign up at bethanywv.edu/event/oreon-e-scott-lectures-2
- Follow our friends at **Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation** for 30 Days of Pittsburgh Prays in the lead-up to the NFL Draft, with prayer walks across the city beginning April 7.

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