

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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to be one in Christ



September/October/November 2025, Number 4

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

Local Judicatories Welcome New Bishops, Executives

The times, they are a changin'! This summer, four of Christian Associates' member judicatories welcomed new leaders. We're excited to greet these new members of our Council of Bishops & Judicatory Executives:

Bishop Mark A. Eckman, Roman Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh

On June 4, the Holy See appointed Bishop Mark Eckman as the 13th Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh. He was installed into that office on July 14.

Bishop Eckman grew up in the Diocese of Pittsburgh and has served it throughout his forty years of ordained ministry: as parochial vicar and pastor of parishes through Allegheny County, as



Bishop Mark Eckman; Bishop Melissa Stoller
episcopal vicar for clergy personnel, and as auxiliary bishop.

"Bishop Eckman brings a deep knowledge of this diocese and a steady commitment to ministry in this context," said Rev. Liddy Barlow, Christian Associates' Executive Minister, upon word of Bishop Eckman's appointment.

"I feel confident that he will continue the legacy of friendship and collaboration established by his predecessors."

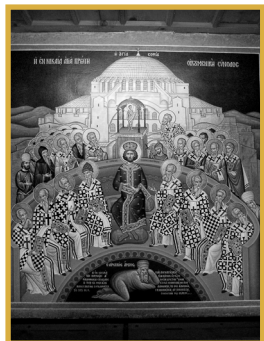
Bishop Eckman has one living sister and enjoys spending time with his extended family. He is an avid photographer, enjoys hiking and skiing, and loves mystery novels.

Bishop Melissa L. Stoller, Southwestern PA Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Pastor Melissa L. Stoller was elected on June 13 to serve a six-year term as bishop of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). She is the first woman to hold the position of

Continued on page 3

Reflection Book, Event to Mark 1700th Anniversary of Council of Nicaea



As this milestone year continues, Christian Associates is making plans to commemorate the 1700th anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea this November with a devotional

publication and an evening event.

We Believe, a devotional discussion guide, will include short essays from members of the Christian Associates Council of Bishops & Executives as well as other local Christian leaders.

Authors will reflect on the Nicene Creed, the historical context of the First Ecumenical Council, and the role that confessions of faith play in various Christian traditions. Each reflection will also include a question for group discussion, making the booklet appropriate for use in small-group contexts such as Sunday School classes.

Submissions for the book from authors across Southwest Pennsylvania are welcome and are due October 15. Email lbarlow@casp.org for submission guidelines.

On **Tuesday, November 18** at 7 p.m. in the Cardinals Great Hall, O'Connor Hall, Diocese of Pittsburgh Pastoral Center (2900 Noblestown Road, Pittsburgh 15205), all are welcome to

attend an ecumenical celebration of the Nicene anniversary and the publication of *We Believe*. The evening will include a prayer service, essay readings, and group discussions, as well as a celebratory reception. A free copy of the book will be shared with all attendees.

Bring a group from your parish or your neighborhood! All are welcome. RSVPs for the celebration are helpful but not required at casp.org/nicaea.

"After canceling the spring Nicaea event due to schedule conflicts, we didn't want this year to pass without commemorating this important anniversary," said Rev. Liddy Barlow. "Let's celebrate together as we declare: *We Believe!*"

REFLECTIONS ALONG THE WAY

Dear friends,

Over Labor Day weekend, my family traveled to the “Pennsylvania Wilds,” spending two nights in a Coudersport cabin with my son’s godparents. We were drawn to the woods by the promise of rural scenery, fun diversions, and most of all, the night sky. Cherry Springs State Park, just outside Coudersport, is an International Dark Sky Park, recognized as one of the best places on the East Coast for stargazing.

My family lives in East Liberty; our house is ringed by streetlights and hemmed in by neighbors and hillsides. Even when Pittsburgh’s clouds deign to part, we can spot only the brightest stars from our backyard.

The former airstrip that has become the Public Viewing Area at Cherry Springs, in contrast, is a huge flat field at the crest of a hill, miles away from any major town. It offers a 360-degree view of the night sky, with 10,000 visible stars on a clear night.

We were not alone in making our way to Cherry Springs on the holiday weekend; a long line of cars entered the parking lot with us, and the field was peppered with camp chairs, picnic blankets, and hobby telescopes. A food truck offered hot chocolate to warm up the unexpectedly chilly evening.

I saw people of every age and every race in the field: perhaps 300 people all together. Many of us gathered in an amphitheater at sunset for an orientation program led by a park ranger. He asked where we were from; responses came from near—St. Mary’s, Williamsport—and far—New York City, Florida, India.



Photo by Brian Cohen

As the sunset colors faded from the sky, more and more stars were visible. Finally, we could see the swirling fog of the Milky Way stretching all the way across the sky. We gazed back in time, at light that shined to us across millions of miles and hundreds of light years. We found constellations that tell thousand-year-old stories; we spotted satellites that tell of modern technological achievement. We waited for the setting of the waxing moon, and watched the stars grow even brighter in its absence.

All that, while moving and beautiful, was also just as I’d expected: the awe of gazing up at the night sky was what had inspired our trip to Cherry Springs in the first place. But I also experienced another kind of awe that night, one that caught me by surprise.

To be able to see the night sky in all its grandeur, our eyes need to adjust to the darkness, a process that takes twenty to thirty minutes. The briefest flash of white light reactivates our color vision and resets that timer all over again. To see in the dark, we need it to stay dark.

And amazingly, for hours on end, the crowd gathered in Cherry Springs stayed dark. No one pulled out a phone. No one shone a bright flashlight. No one triggered a camera flash by mistake. From across our diversity, across our multitude, the crowd prioritized the common good, and made wonder possible for one another.

Headlines might suggest that society is growing more inconsiderate, more self-centered, less able to collaborate. Stargazing in Cherry Springs suggests just the opposite: Cooperation is still possible. We can change our habits for the good of others. When we gather in search of mystery and awe, when we come together in search of something greater than ourselves, we can express care and kindness for one another. And in fact, that very kindness helps us to see the wonder we came looking for.

It happens in a hilltop field. I think it happens in our churches too.

Your sister in Christ,

The Rev. Liddy Barlow
Executive Minister



Twelve-year-old Edmund Barlow checks out moon craters through a telescope while waiting for sunset at Cherry Springs State Park.

Stand For All Pittsburgh Plans First Annual United Against Hate Week



Our region's new hate and bias action team, Stand for All Pittsburgh, is celebrating United Against Hate Week this October 19-25. The

team is preparing 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.

Opportunities are being added to the calendar daily; find it online at unitedagainsthateweek.org, and search for "Pittsburgh" to find local events.

Your church or organization can also add events to the calendar. Perhaps you already have an event planned during the week of October 19-25 that would fit

right in to the themes of United Against Hate Week. Or perhaps you would like to sponsor or co-sponsor a new event, such as a film screening, book discussion, training, concert, art show, or festival. Check out the toolkits at unitedagainsthateweek.org for ideas, and then add your event to the calendar by clicking its green "submit event" button.

Christian Associates is co-sponsoring two events during United Against Hate Week: a workshop and forum for Reckoning with Antisemitism as Christians (*see page 4*) and a Love Anyway Feast.

With a panoply of partners, Christian Associates invites the community to join in a potluck celebration of relationship across differences at our second annual **Love Anyway Feast**, 6 p.m. on October 22 in the Kadel Dining Room at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. Enjoy breaking bread with neighbors, sharing in dialogue about the ways we can reduce hate and bias in our community,

and—new this year!—raising our voices in a community singalong led by local musician and spiritual leader Sara Stock Mayo.

Bring a group from your church, bring your whole family, and invite a friend! Because space is limited, registration is essential: visit bit.ly/loveanyway2025.

Love Anyway Feasts are an initiative of Common Ground USA. You can learn more and plan a Love Anyway Feast in your own community by visiting cg-usa.org/initiatives/love-anyway-feasts.



Interfaith friends at the 2024 Love Anyway Feast.

Local Judicatories Welcome New Bishops, Executives *continued from page 1*

Bishop in this Synod, and will be formally installed on October 18.

In her candidacy address to the Synod, she emphasized the importance of unity: "We are the Body of Christ, all of us, and I believe one of the most important tasks ahead of us is to strengthen the ties that bind us, the tendons that hold us together: to re-member the body of Christ in all its gorgeous diversity."

Bishop Stoller served as Director for Evangelical Mission and Assistant to the Bishop for the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod for eight years. Prior to this role, she pastored churches in Penn Hills and Minnesota, and served a pastoral internship at the Moscow Protestant Chaplaincy in Russia. She and her husband Eric have one son, Adam, who is in high school.

The Rev. Erin Kobs, Presbytery of Kiskiminetas, PC-USA

Adopting a new presbytery structure, on July 19 the Presbytery of



The Rev. Erin Kobs; The Rev. Richard D. White

Kiskiminetas elected the Rev. Erin Kobs as its Organizational Presbyter and Stated Clerk and the Rev. Dr. Angela Cowser as its Training Presbyter.

Rev. Kobs, who will represent the presbytery at Christian Associates' Council of Bishops & Executives, is a familiar face, having served as Transitional General Presbyter since the retirement of Dr. Don Wilson in spring 2024. A Pittsburgh native, she most recently served as pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Punxsutawney, and previously served churches in eastern Pennsylvania and Minnesota.

Rev. Kobs is currently a Doctor of Ministry student at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in the Creative Writing & Public Theology. She shares her home with Watson, her orange tabby cat.

The Rev. Richard D. White, Allegheny Union Baptist Association

The Allegheny Union Baptist Association has elected the Rev. Richard D. White as its next Moderator.

Rev. White has pastored Morning Star Baptist Church in Clairton since 2020, having previously served Friendship Baptist Church in Washington. He grew up at Nazarene Baptist Church in Homewood, and served as Assistant to the Pastor there under the Rev. Ricky V. Burgess, the AUBA's most recent Moderator.

Rev. White is currently attending Andersonville Theological Seminary. He and his wife Ebonie have three children: Isaiah, Elijah, and Nevaeh.

Ready to Reckon with Antisemitism? We Can Help!

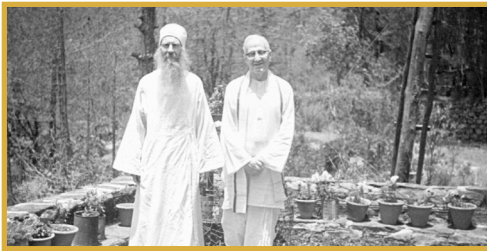
Conversations about antisemitism are complicated and challenging ... and essential. The *Reckoning with Antisemitism as Christians* project is ready to help.

The project is a partnership between Christian Associates, the Holocaust Center of Pittsburgh, and Temple Emanuel of South Hills. In July, *Reckoning with Antisemitism as Christians* received a Community Priorities Grant from the Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh, acknowledging the project's promise in helping Christians grapple with the legacy of antisemitism and propelling Christians and Jews into a new, vibrant and fruitful, relationship.

At 7 p.m. on **Tuesday, October 21** at **St. Andrew's Lutheran Church** (304 Morewood Ave, Pittsburgh 15213), *Reckoning with Antisemitism as Christians* invites you to an evening with Christian clergy and lay leaders. We'll hear from Christians across our region who are already building these essential bridges: engaging deeply with texts, studying the impact of antisemitism, partnering with neighboring houses of worship, befriending Jewish colleagues. We'll then participate in an interactive planning session, working together to consider how each of us can reckon with antisemitism and build relationships with Jewish neighbors this year. Learn more and RSVP at casp.org/reckoning.

As the year goes on, there will be many ways that *Reckoning with Antisemitism as Christians* can help you. You might attend a text study, talking through a thorny passage of scripture with the help of a local scholar. You might bring your learning and reckoning into the pulpit, sharing a sermon as part of our Preaching Challenge. You might find new ways to partner with a Jewish congregation near you, applying for one of our upcoming micro-grants to support a fellowship or learning event. The best way to find out about these opportunities will be to join the *Reckoning with Antisemitism as Christians* email list; find the link at casp.org/reckoning, or look to future editions of *The Call*.

Conference Explores Sharing the Good News ...in the Right Way



E. Stanley Jones with Father Lazarus in an undated image. Photo ©Asbury Seminary; used by permission.

The Western Pennsylvania Association of the United Methodist Church, along with the E. Stanley Jones Foundation, will sponsor the "Sharing the Good News...in the Right Way" Conference on Saturday, September 27

from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at Dutilh United Methodist Church, Cranberry Township.

The conference is based around the teachings of E. Stanley Jones, described as the "greatest missionary since Saint Paul" for his missionary work in India. Jones resolved early in his ministry to present the person of Jesus Christ apart from the trappings of Christianity, Western culture or civilization. Unlike his contemporaries, Jones chose not to argue or debate with non-Christians and try to prove them wrong and Christianity right.

Four keynote speakers will address attendees. They include:

- The Rev. Dr. Jack Johnson, President, The Foundation for Evangelism
- The Rev. Dr. Robert Haynes, Lead Pastor, Christ Wesleyan Church and Educational Liaison, World Methodist Evangelism
- The Rev. Tom Albin, Director of Development for the United Christian Ashrams International
- The Rev. Dr. Kimberly Reisman, Executive Director, World Methodist Evangelism

The cost to attend is \$45; continuing education credits are offered. For more information and to register, please visit wpa-reg.brtapp.com/SharingTheGoodNews.

Amen to Action Invites Meal-Packing Volunteers

Five weekends – fourteen sites – thousands of volunteers – one million meals for our neighbors!

Spend a morning this November alongside your neighbors of faith and goodwill as together we pack a million meals for the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank. Amen to Action, an initiative of the Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation, is signing up volunteers now for its ninth annual service events.

The events take place on Saturday mornings as well as the Friday after Thanksgiving at host churches across the region, from Macedonia Baptist in the Hill District to Christ United Methodist in Bethel Park to Grove City College. Choose a site near you by visiting plf.org/a2a.

Monetary donations are also greatly appreciated; a gift of \$35 provides 100 meals.



Volunteers packing meals for Amen to Action in 2024.

REACH Program Speakers Offer Stories of Resilience for Your Congregation

Are you or your congregation interested in building empathy, celebrating diversity, and forming new bonds? The REACH Speakers Bureau, a project of the 10.27 Healing Partnership, invites you to reach out.

REACH is composed of survivors and family members of the October 27, 2018 synagogue shooting. REACH speakers have spoken at schools, professional conferences, on panels, and at educational events since 2023, and would like to connect with new communities across Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and beyond.

At REACH engagements speakers tell their personal stories of loss, resilience and strength. Conversations can delve into their experiences with antisemitism, mass violence, healing and resiliency, and their thoughts on how we can become better communities that combat hate in all its forms. Every family member and survivor's voice has power and each speaker shares the same sacred commitment to sharing their story.

If you or your congregation is interested in inviting REACH speakers to your community, please visit 1027healingpartnership.org/reach to fill out a request form. A 10.27 Healing Partnership staff member will be happy to help you through the process.

Courtesy Emery Malachowski, 10.27 Healing Partnership

Great Lakes Call Finder Unifies Job Postings



Back in 1997, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the United Church of Christ, and the Reformed Church in America affirmed

A Formula of Agreement, a full communion relationship that provides for “orderly exchange” of clergy across the four denominations.

A new website is bringing that relationship into the modern era, making it easier than ever for leaders from these four traditions to find pastoral calls and employment opportunities across denominational lines.

The Great Lakes Call Finder (greatlakescallfinder.org) is a job board posting opportunities in Presbyterian, Reformed, UCC, and ELCA settings from 30 judicatories across a wide region, from New York to Wisconsin and Michigan to Kentucky. It lists pastoral openings as well as positions for music directors, youth leaders, and administrative and custodial roles.

Churches from these traditions are welcome to add their own postings to the Call Finder. For more information, contact Barry Chance, General Presbyter and Stated Clerk of Eastminster Presbytery, barry@eastminsterpresbytery.org.



THE WESTERN PA FAMILY CENTER'S
40TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE AND SYMPOSIUM

OCTOBER 17 – 18, 2025

Love and Conflict in Families and Groups: How Relationship Forces Shape Human Behavior

A Hybrid Conference (online via Zoom, or in person at the Pittsburgh Mennonite Church in Swissvale)

Many churches and religious organizations find Bowen family systems theory immensely useful. This is not surprising, as churches and organizations consist of people who come from family systems, and they form relationship systems themselves.

The Western PA Family Center (WPFC) has made knowledge of Bowen theory widely accessible since 1985. *WPFC's upcoming conference will explore how family systems ideas can help with the messiness of love and conflict in all human groups.*



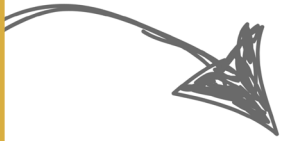
VISIT OUR WEBSITE TO REGISTER & LEARN MORE
WWW.WPFC.NET



Keynote Speaker

Phil Klever, LCSW, LMFT

Bowen Practitioner,
Speaker, and Researcher



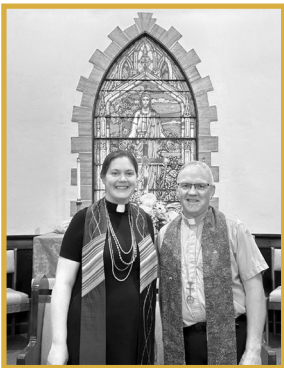
Your Vote Matters

The League of Women Voters of Greater Pittsburgh encourages *all* citizens to engage in the public sphere and actively participate in elections as informed voters. Vote your values on November 4, 2025.

Nonpartisan election and candidate information for the upcoming Municipal General Election is available at our webpage, lwvpg.org under the 2025 Elections and Voting drop-downs. Find downloadable voting resources and toolkit(s) at lwvpg.org/community.



Thank You, Trinity UCC!



In July, Trinity United Church of Christ in Dorseyville designated Christian Associates as its monthly Mission Focus. The congregation learned about Christian Associates' ministries each week, culminating in a visit from Rev. Liddy Barlow, and collected special offerings totaling \$805. Enormous thanks to Trinity UCC and Pastor David Mears for this amazing support for Christian unity!

Classified Advertisement

Musician for Hire

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The Rev. Dr. Graham Standish, Executive Director



BLESSED BE EDUCATORS

Annual Prayer Breakfast

Saturday, October 25

9:15 to 11:30 a.m. (doors open 8:30 a.m.)

Church of the Redeemer Parish Hall
5700 Forbes Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15217
(Near corner of Forbes & Murray Avenues)

Hot Breakfast | Door Prizes | Gift Bags | Free Parking

Guest Speaker

Dr. Asa J. Lee,
President of Pittsburgh
Theological Seminary

Tickets

\$15/adult, \$7.50/child
Contact Mary Ann Hvizdos
mahvizdos@verizon.net
412-807-1611

This is BBE's Annual
Fundraiser.
A free-will offering will be
taken.



To provide educators with spiritual support & recognition by sponsoring faith-based programs.



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Generous need-based and merit financial aid is available to students who qualify.

Join Our June 2026 Cohorts:



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- Christian Spirituality
- Creative Writing and Public Theology



Learn more and apply at www.pts.edu/doctor-of-ministry

SUPPORTING TODAY'S CHURCH LEADERS

Plan now to join us for the following events this fall!



Pastor Appreciation Event—*The 2050 Church: Culture, Technology, and The Call To Lead*

With the Rev. Dr. William Curtis, Presenting, and the Rev. Dr. Edwin van Driel, Preaching

Oct. 9, 2025, 9:30 a.m.-3:00 p.m., In Person



W. Don McClure Lecture—*What Kenneth Bailey Taught Us About Mission—And What's Next*

With Dr. Michael Parker

Oct. 21, 2025, 4:00-7:30 p.m., In Person and Online



Rethinking Christology for a New Missional Era

With the Rev. Dr. Sam Wells and the Rev. Dr. Edwin van Driel

Nov. 20, 2025, 11:30 a.m.-3:45 p.m., In Person and Online



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We Have to Talk Field Trips

The yellow school bus is waiting in the driveway, your brown-bag lunch is all packed, your signed permission slip is in your hand...you are ready for a field trip!

In the 2025-6 program year, the We Have to Talk series of gatherings for interfaith spiritual leaders is going on the road. As we explore destinations across our community, we'll

- **Break out** of our own spaces to discover hidden gems across Southwest Pennsylvania, meeting new people and discovering new places;
- **Learn** about resources, ideas, and traditions that can inform our own spiritual leadership;
- **Talk** about important issues with our colleagues and



friends, listening and sharing across our differences as we stretch our minds and grow in understanding.

Please save these dates for our We Have to Talk interfaith field trips:

- Tuesday, November 18
- Tuesday, January 13
- Thursday, March 5
- Wednesday, May 6

To be the first to hear about our field trips, be sure you have signed up for email updates from We Have to Talk by visiting casp.org/interfaithemail.

Need to Change Your Address?

Perhaps you have moved? Is this copy of *The Call* addressed correctly?
Visit casp.org/addresschange and complete a simple form to help us keep our records up-to-date.