Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania

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



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

Bread for the World Plans Advocacy Workshop to "Nourish Our Future"

"Blessed are the merciful," Jesus said, "for they will receive mercy." Today, we seek to follow his example, especially as we consider the wellbeing of children. Across the world, one in five children are malnourished. Right here in Pennsylvania, one in eight children faces food insecurity.

In response to this crisis, Bread for the World has launched Nourish Our Future, a child-focused advocacy campaign that aims to make a historic impact against child hunger and malnutrition, both in the U.S. and around the world. The campaign equips Christians across the country to convince Congress to expand the child tax credit, protect and modernize WIC, address hunger on college campuses, and restore international food assistance.

On **Saturday, March 22** at **St. Mary of the Mount Church** on Mount Washington in Pittsburgh, the Southwest Pennsylvania Chapter of Bread for the



Pittsburghers came to Washington, D.C. on February 4 for the launch of the Nourish Our Future Campaign. Left to right: Rev. Dr. Laura Strauss, co-chair of the Southwest PA Bread Team; Andrea Faiano, State Organizer for Pennsylvania; Rev. Liddy Barlow, Christian Associates; Rev. Heather Taylor, Managing Director of Bread for the World.

World is hosting the **Blessed Are the Merciful Hunger Advocacy Workshop** to encourage Christians in our area to join the Nourish Our Future campaign.

- Find out about the issues and the legislative priorities, why they matter for children, and what you can do to make a difference.
- Discover the neighborhood implications of federal policies as we hear from local leaders.
- Practice strategies for sharing your perspectives with lawmakers to help shape more merciful public policy.
- And, get inspired by a call to action from a special surprise virtual guest! (Here's a hint: he'll be reminding us to *keep on travelin*' toward a world where everyone is fed.)

The program begins at 9:30 a.m. and concludes at 12:30 p.m., followed by an optional lunch. To register, visit *https://bit.ly/Bread2025*.

Pittsburgh Prays Convenes Youth Leaders for Ecumenical Discernment

In 2016, Reid Carpenter (founder of Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation) and Bishop David Zubik of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh, invited diverse Christian leaders to gather and pray together. Out of these gatherings, the leaders discerned the Spirit's call to a tremendous new initiative: Amen to Action, an ecumenical project that since 2017 has packed over seven million meals for our hungry neighbors and connected Christians from a wide array of ecumenical backgrounds.

Inspired by that experience, and trusting that the Lord can guide us toward even greater unity, Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation, the Roman Catholic Diocese, and Christian Associates began a new series of prayer meetings in 2022, under the banner of **Pittsburgh Prays**. For 18 months, leaders have gathered quarterly at the Diocesan Pastoral Center: singing and praying together, hearing speakers, sharing discussion, and connecting across our differences as we celebrate our unity in Christ.

The Spirit has been at work! The group is being led to focus on the **youth and young adults** of our region: how can we all, as diverse ecumenical leaders, best support the existing outstanding youth ministries in our region — and how can we come together to do even more for the rising generation? At our next convening, **Tuesday**, **March 11 at 7 p.m. at the Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh Pastoral Center**, we hope to welcome leaders in youth and young adult ministry from all denominations and traditions. In table conversations, group brainstorming, but especially in our prayer, we seek to discern a path forward that can serve and celebrate our youth, and help make Pittsburgh "more famous for God than for steel."

If ministry with youth and young adults is a passion and priority for you, please plan to attend, and share this invitation with a friend or colleague. RSVP for the gathering by contacting David Solberg, *dsolberg@diopitt.org*.

REFLECTIONS ALONG THE WAY

Dear friends,

osques in Rwanda might seem extremely far away from churches in Southwest Pennsylvania, but we have more in common than you might expect.

In 1994, longtime mistrust between Rwandan ethnic groups turned into vicious violence and ultimately to genocide, with over half a million people killed within eight months. Members of the Hutu ethnic group attacked their Tutsi counterparts. Often this violence was perpetrated face to face among people who knew each other: literal neighbors, classmates, and colleagues were transformed into murderers and victims.



Photo by Brian Cohen

However, historians of the genocide have noticed one group that, for the most part, did not participate in the genocide: Rwanda's Muslim minority. Although

Muslims included both Hutus and Tutsis, they did not turn on one another. Instead, they spoke out against the killing and helped to protect Tutsis of all religious groups, at risk to their own lives.



Human skulls at the Nyamata Genocide Memorial, Rwanda. Photo by I, Inisheer, CC BY-SA 3.0

Researchers credit this extraordinary action to the actions of Muslim leaders before and during the genocide. The imams de-emphasized ethnic identity, promoting a united identity as Muslims. They preached frequently about the behavioral expectations of believers: acting peacefully, doing justice, helping the innocent. They grounded these norms in their faith tradition, citing the Quran. They shared these calls to action often, in sermons, at schools, and in pastoral letters circulated throughout the nation.

I learned about the work of these Muslim leaders in my service with Common Ground USA's Pennsylvania Resilience Network, the team committed to preventing and responding to political violence in our commonwealth and promoting social cohesion across political difference. At a time when our country is showing worrying signs of division, their story gives me hope. I believe that Christian leaders in Southwest Pennsylvania are positioned to lead work resisting violence in our communities, following the same example:

- We can create, share, and reiterate the norms of expected behavior in our communities. We can set peace as a baseline expectation, praise nonviolent approaches to conflict, and declare our intention to live in diverse multicultural community.
- We can draw on the resources of our faith tradition. We don't need to be experts in political science or group psychology to do this work: our scriptures, liturgy, history, and theology offer all we need. Our faith teaches us that peacemakers are blessed, that Christians have stayed true to our faith during challenging times before, and that peace is something we can pass from one person to another.
- We can remind one another of our truest identity. No matter our denomination, no matter what our immigration status or our race, no matter how we voted in November, or what we have made of these first dizzying weeks of a new presidential administration, or happens next in our nation, we have an identity that is stronger than any other. We are Christians. We proclaim that Jesus is Lord. We are called to love one another, to love our neighbors, and to love our enemies. And we are called to share that good news of love with the whole world, in our words and our actions.

At this fractious time, we too can prioritize an identity that takes precedent over all other identities we name. May we continue to be worthy of claiming the name of Christ; may we live out our high calling with God's help.

Your sister in Christ,

The Rev. Liddy Barlow Executive Minister Christian Associates of Southwest PA

Stay up-to-date with ecumenical news as it happens by subscribing to our e-newsletter, Unity n'At. Visit casp.org/sign-up.

Two Spring Conferences Explore Healing, Leadership, and Pastoral Care

Clergy, spiritual directors, pastoral counselors, therapists, chaplains, and lay people who care for souls have two opportunities this spring to gather for inspiration, learning, and networking. The Pneuma Conference in March and the Pittsburgh Pastoral Care Conference in May both feature nationallynoted speakers, wisdom from local practitioners, and an array of workshops and discussions.

Pneuma Conference

On March 28-29, the Pneuma Institute and Pittsburgh Theological Seminary offer **Awaking the Spirit of Healing and Restoration**, a conference exploring the process of reconciliation and wholeness in ourselves and in our communities. It is offered both in person at the seminary and online.



Dr. Margaret Wheatley

Friday evening keynote speaker Dr. Margaret Wheatley will explore "Restoring Sanity for Spiritual Leaders." She is the bestselling author of *Leadership and the New Science*, among many other books, and a consultant who has worked with corporations, nonprofits, and other organizations around the world.

The Rev. Dr. Leanna Fuller, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary's Joan Marshall Associate Professor of Pastoral Care, will deliver Saturday's keynote address. She will also facilitate a workshop on congregational conflict and practices of reconciliation.

Dr. Michael Mervosh will offer a workshop on inter/intrapersonal challenges and resilience. He is the



The Rev. Dr. Leanna Fuller, Dr. Michael Mervosh

founder of MGM Psychological Associates: in addition to his 33 years of experience as a psychotherapist with individuals, he has also consulted with leaders and clergy in the Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh.

The conference concludes with a panel of local leaders reflecting on "Cultivating Peace, Healing, and Generosity in Our Communities."

Registration is \$145, and more details are available at *pts.edu/pneuma-conference-2025*. Please register by March 21.



Pittsburgh Pastoral Care Conference

Mark your calendar for Friday, May 2 for the 25th annual Pittsburgh Pastoral Care Conference, **Making the Impossible Possible**, featuring keynote speaker Bill Strickland.

The conference takes place from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.; a location in the area will be announced soon.



Bill Strickland

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:

- "'Pastoral Care' or 'Spiritual Care'? Serving People in Palliative and Hospice Settings" with Pastor Kimberly Rapczak, Allegheny Health Network
- "Ministry with the Latino Community" with Mr. Jorge Vela, Roman Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh
- "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.

Registration opens March 2 at *pghpcc.org*. Information about sponsorship and tabling opportunities are also available on the website.

We wish to acknowledge the following donors whose names were inadvertently listed incorrectly in our December 2024 issue:

The Rev. Ruth Bosch Becker Mr. Reid Carpenter

We apologize for the mistakes!

Rev. Dr. Ted A. Smith to Deliver Bethany College Scott Lectures



Bethany College welcomes Rev. Dr. Ted A. Smith, associate dean of the faculty and professor of divinity at Emory University's Candler School of Theology, as the featured speaker for the upcoming **Oreon E. Scott Lecture Series**. The event will be held at First Christian Church in Washington, Pa., from **April 28-29**.

Rev. Dr. Smith is an esteemed scholar

whose work explores the connections between preaching, ethics, and public life. At Candler, he teaches extensively on these areas and serves as director of the project "Theological Education between the Times" which brings together diverse groups to reflect on the evolving purposes of theological education.

Smith's latest publication, *The End of Theological Education* (2023), critically examines the shifts in theological institutions in the United States.

The registration fee is \$65 for participants and \$30 for seminarians; a Zoom option costs \$30. For more information and to register, visit *bethanywv.edu/event/scott-lectures*.

Assoc. of Pittsburgh Priests Presents Rev. Ronald Rolheiser, OMI

The Association of Pittsburgh Priests will present **"Risking Prophecy in a Time of Bitter Polarization,"** a lecture by Rev. Ronald Rolheiser, OMI, on **March 12 from 7-8:30 p.m. via Zoom.** Rolheiser, a Catholic priest in the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, will address theological questions such as "What prophetic stance brings the fire of Jesus rather than the fire of division?" and "How do we speak prophetic words and



do prophetic actions in a country, church, and community that are deeply divided without causing further division?"

A community-builder, lecturer, and writer, Rolheiser's popular books and weekly newspaper present theology and spirituality in a compelling manner. He formerly taught theology and philosophy at Newman Theological College in Edmonton, Alberta for 16 years, served as Provincial Superior of his Oblate Province for six years, and served on the General Council for the Oblates in Rome for six years. He has been President at Oblate School of Theology since 2005.

There is no cost to attend. For more information and to register, please visit *associationofpittsburghpriests.com*.

Preachers: Share Your Sermon Reckoning with Antisemitism

Text Study Offered March 10 to Explore the Stories of Holy Week

The Holy Bible is the story that shapes our lives as Christians; the scriptures are a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Yet at the same time, through the centuries, Christians have wielded the Bible as a weapon against our Jewish neighbors. How can we acknowledge that harm, repair the relationship, and imagine a new way forward?

Christian Associates and the Holocaust Center of Pittsburgh are partners in the **Reckoning with Antisemitism as Christians** project, helping Christians of all denominations to face the complex legacy of antisemitism in the Christian tradition and build a future without hate.

The reckoning journey begins with a fresh encounter with the Bible, and preachers can lead the way. In 2025, we are challenging preachers in our region to model reckoning with antisemitism from the pulpit. In your preaching, confess the ways that scripture has been interpreted for harm and offer your congregation a fresh way to understand the sacred text, promoting healing and reconciliation between Christians and Jews.



Synagoga and Ecclesia in Our Time (2015), bronze sculpture by Joshua Koffman. Commissioned by Saint Joseph's University to mark the 50th anniversary of Nostra Aetate. Photograph by and courtesy of Melissa Kelly/melissakelly. com. Licensed under CC BY 4.0.

To help support you in reckoning with scripture, join Professor Tucker Ferda and Rabbi Jamie Gibson on **Monday**, **March 10** to explore the lectionary texts for Holy Week.

Dr. Ferda is Associate Professor of New Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. Rabbi Gibson is Rabbi Emeritus at Temple Sinai in Squirrel Hill and currently holds the Rabbi Jason Edelstein Chair in Catholic-Jewish Dialogue at Saint Vincent College. Together, they will explore the ways the Passion narrative has been used for harm — and how preachers can instead proclaim a message that is sensitive to context, theologically sound, and transformative for our relationship with our Jewish neighbors.

The study takes place at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.; lunch is included and there is no cost. Registration is available at *casp.org/ reckoning*.

As preachers throughout the region take on this challenge, we will be collecting your sermons to be featured in the next volume of *The Word in Our Voices* series. Sermons may be shared as a text document, or as an audio or video recording. Newsletter articles, essays, and other pieces of writing are also welcome for submission.

To submit a sermon, visit *casp.org/ reckoning*. Preachers whose pieces are selected for publication will receive a printed copy of the book; due to limited space, we may not be able to include all submissions.

Cantate Usquam Pilgrim Singers Help Congregations That Love Music, but Struggle to Sing

Cantate Usquam means "sing anywhere," and a new volunteer group 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 volunteers who want to sing with you and share the joy that music brings to worship
- are led by musicians who have experience leading congregations and choirs in singing
- are ecumenical and eager to work with you to sing hymns and music from your tradition
- will sing choir pieces for a prelude, offertory, or communion
- love to sing a capella but can also use available instruments
- are available for dates in 2025 (excluding Holy Week or Easter)
- wear no robes and sing from within your congregation, not up front.

If your church would like to learn more, contact Michael Salmon (*oriolefish@gmail.com* / 904-718-7622) or Penny Anderson (*penny_anderson@fastmail.fm* / 412-310-9167).

This project is supported by Lutheran Campus Ministries and Calvary Episcopal Church.

Markus Passion, Lost J. S. Bach Work, to Premiere in Pittsburgh

This April, Pittsburgh will play host to the world premiere of a lost treasure: Johann Sebastian Bach's Markus Passion.

While J.S. Bach wrote Passion settings for the gospels of Mark as well as for Matthew and John, shortly after his death, the manuscript was lost by his publisher.



Now, music lovers around the world will finally get to hear a new edition of this lost masterpiece, thanks to musicologist Malcolm Bruno, who reconstructed the Markus Passion based on other works by J.S. Bach. In cooperation with Concert Theatre Works and New York City-based ensemble The Sebastians, Pittsburgh's own Chatham Baroque will help bring the Markus Passion to life in what they call "a gripping theatrical format."

The staging will include an ensemble of 14 instrumentalists, four singers, and acclaimed Royal Shakespeare Company actor Joseph Marcell as the Evangelist, a unique role created by Bruno for this work. Marcell is best known to American audiences as Geoffrey, the butler on the hit sitcom "The Fresh Prince of Bel Air."

Don't miss the premiere of this unique work on Friday, April 11, 7:30 p.m. at Carnegie Music Hall, Oakland, before it heads to New York City and beyond. Tickets are available at *chathambaroque.org*.

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 2024:

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 Archepachy 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 District, North American Lutheran Church Penn West Conference, United Church of Christ
Pittsburgh Presbytery, Presbyterian Church (USA)
Redstone Presbytery, Presbyterian Church (USA)
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Church in America
Third Episcopal District, African Methodist
Episcopal Church
Washington Presbytery, Presbyterian Church (USA)
Western Pennsylvania Conference, United
Methodist Church
Western Pennsylvania Divison, 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.

Meeting the Elephant through the Eyes of One Another

By Annie Leech, Christian Associates Student Assistant

The story goes that, while traveling, a group of blind men encountered an elephant. Unsure of how to proceed, they gathered around the creature to discern its nature. Each man, feeling a different part of the unknown creature, used his experiential knowing to make a judgment. "Why, it's a spear!" one man declared, touching its tusk. "No, no, it's a tree trunk," another argued, feeling the sturdy pillar of the elephant's leg. After they had each offered their judgment, they found themselves at an impasse. Surely it couldn't be a spear and a tree trunk! It was only when the men began listening into each other's experiences, trusting the truth of their perspectives, that they were able to discern the elephant's true nature.

Preachers often use the parable of the elephant and the blind men to encourage humility. "Be humble; you can't see the whole elephant," might be a takeaway. And while humility is of



great importance, I also see the story as illustrating the power and necessity of our relationships.

In The Christian Life, Karl Barth compares the Church to a circle wrapping around Christ. Through my work as student assistant for Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania, I have had the great privilege of witnessing such a circle. From listening to bishops and pastors lovingly banter at quarterly council meetings to breaking bread with hundreds of spiritual seekers committed to "loving anyway," I am learning that faithful ecumenism is deeply relational. Through these budding relationships, something remarkable has begun to happen in my own spiritual life: each encounter has deepened my conviction that we only come to know God through each other.

We are living in a time when "rightness" rules and facts seem to vary according to position. And yet, like the blind men around the elephant or the circle of the Church around Christ, the diversity of our perspectives is our greatest treasure. When we gather together in love and trust, we unite as one Body.

City of Pittsburgh Invites Faith Leaders to Meetings

The City of Pittsburgh's Department of Public Safety invites faith leaders within the city to join two ongoing monthly meetings.

The **Faith-Based Monthly Meeting**, which takes place via Microsoft Teams, is an opportunity for faith leaders to discuss their activities, share information, and support each other, seeking to foster unity and collaboration. A recent call included a report from the Group Violence Intervention initiative and brainstorming about how churches might respond to incidents of neighborhood violence.

The **Citywide Crisis Team Meeting**, which takes place in-person at varying locations, brings together faith-based organizations along with other nonprofits and businesses to plan comprehensive and effective community preparation and response to critical events such as severe weather, mass shootings, or civil unrest.

For more information and to receive calendar invitations to these calls, contact Amber Phillips, administrative assistant to Assistant Director David Jones, at *amber.phillips@pittsburghpa.gov*.



Bradford Woods Community Church, nestled in the heart of Bradford Woods, PA, (just a stone's throw from Pittsburgh), a vibrant nondenominational congregation, seeks a dynamic pastor who embodies warmth, charisma, and a passion for community. We are looking for someone who can connect with people, inspire growth, and lead our church. We're a close-knit congregation averaging about 30-35 in Sunday attendance, with a rich history dating back to 1915.

Our ideal candidate will embody Christ's love, foster inclusivity, and guide us in spiritual growth and community service. We are also looking for someone who can connect with people to grow the congregation in an intentional and meaningful way. If you are driven to make a difference and eager to engage with our congregation and the broader community, we want to hear from you!

Come help us continue our mission of spreading God's love through worship, education, and outreach in our serene woodland sanctuary.

FOR MORE DETAILS, PLEASE CONTACT US AT BWCC2025@GMAIL.COM

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The Rev. Dr. Graham Standish, Executive Director





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Transforming Traumas: Fostering Hope and Resilience in our Neighborhoods Kelso Lecture with Dr. Keri Day

March 13, 2025; In Person and Online

Metro–Urban Institute Conference March 14, 2025; In Person

David S. Schaff Lectures

With the Rev. Dr. Teresa L. Fry Brown April 22, 2025; Pittsburgh Theological Seminary; In Person and Online April 23, 2025; First Presbyterian Church, Youngstown, Ohio; In Person Awakening the Spirit of Healing and Restoration Conference With Margaret Wheatley, Michael Mervosh and Leanna Fuller March 28-29, 2025; In Person and Online Co-sponsored by the Pneuma Institute

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



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Panel Discussion Explores Collaboration Between Clergy, Church Musicians

Let's close the distance between the pulpit and the organ bench!

Even as churches face declines in membership and attendance, so are there fewer and fewer organists prepared to serve in part-time positions. How can clergy and organists collaborate in facing these challenges, so that every church can have excellent music and thriving ministry?

Join the **Pittsburgh Chapter of the American Guild of Organists** at Saint John Lutheran Church (601 Washington Ave, Carnegie 15106) at **7:30 p.m. on Monday, February 24** for a panel discussion bringing together clergy and organists.



Let's explore how clergy and organists can better communicate and collaborate in these changing times. From our varied perspectives we share the same goal: that God be glorified and the Gospel shared.

A dinner catered by Atria's will begin at 6 p.m. at a cost of \$20/person. Make your reservation by February 17 to *drrdkettering@gmail.com*. (Late reservations, \$35.)

If you would like to raise a question or submit a topic for conversation, contact Dr. Wayne Earnest, *musicmanwayne@outlook.com*, by Feb. 22.

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