

Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania

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

The Call . . .

On the Web: 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 2024/January 2025, Number 4

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

In 2025, You Are Invited to Reckon with Antisemitism

Reckoning with Antisemitism as Christians: it's a new project, and a fresh invitation, from Christian Associates and the Holocaust Center of Pittsburgh.

People of every faith and no faith have the responsibility to work against hate. But there is a particular responsibility for Christians when it comes to addressing antisemitism. All too often, through the centuries, it's been Christians who have developed antisemitic ideology and perpetrated violence against Jewish neighbors.

In the face of this history and complicity, Christians need to reckon with antisemitism: to see, confront, and disrupt anti-Jewish thinking and behavior in ourselves, in our faith communities, and in the wider world.

The Reckoning project has sponsored two community conversations so far. In June, a panel of Christian leaders shared their own experiences about coming to terms with antisemitism in Christian theology and tradition. In



Alan Iszauk and Sara Stock Mayo, left, join in conversation with Rev. Liddy Barlow of Christian Associates and Noah Schoen of the Holocaust Center of Pittsburgh at the November 20 "Reckoning with Antisemitism: Listening to Jewish Voices" event.

November, members of Pittsburgh's Jewish community shared the impact that antisemitism has had on Jewish people.

In the new year, the Reckoning project aims to reach churches and

communities across the region. You can help! Take a minute now to visit the form at bit.ly/ReckoningCommit. You'll find a menu of options to choose from, from welcoming a Holocaust Center educator to your church to joining a book club to having a conversation with a Jewish friend. Complete the form, and the Reckoning team will reach out to help support your next steps.

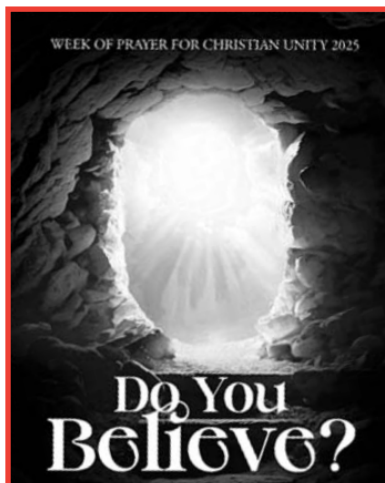
For clergy, the options include preaching a sermon that addresses anti-Jewish interpretations of Christian texts or traditions, and offers a new perspective on them. Group text study opportunities will help you get started. Christian Associates will be collecting these sermons and publishing a new volume of *The Word in Our Voices* sermon series.

For more updates on the Reckoning with Antisemitism as Christians program, sign up for email updates by visiting casp.org/reckoning.

Make Plans Now for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Joining their prayers with siblings across the globe, Christians celebrate the **Week of Prayer for Christian Unity** each year. 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 Week of Prayer is the perfect entry point for a special anniversary year: the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. With the Nicene Creed in mind, the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of



Churches and the Holy See's Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity selected the theme "We Believe" for the 2025 Week of Prayer, with John 11:26 as the focus scripture.

Reflections on the theme, suggested liturgies, and promotional materials are available from the Graymoor Ecumenical & Interreligious Institute, www.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 and we'll help spread the word.

REFLECTIONS ALONG THE WAY

Dear friends,

During last month's "Reckoning with Antisemitism as Christians: Listening to Jewish Voices" event, I stood at the front of the Knox Room at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and said something like this:

"Next, we invite you to form groups of three—try to find people you don't already know. Take the next few minutes to discuss: what did you hear that resonates with your own experience? What questions might you have for the panelists? It's seven o'clock right now, so let's reconnect at about seven ten."

And then—the best part!—I got to watch the magic happen.

Strangers turned to one another, stood up, and moved their chairs into small circles. People introduced themselves and shook hands. The room's silence transformed into the animated murmur of dozens of simultaneous conversations.

On the dais, my co-facilitator, Noah Schoen, and I took in the scene. Speakers were grappling with their words, gesturing widely, meeting the eyes of their partners. Their hearers leaned forward, with curious, open faces. We could almost hear them listening.

Conventional wisdom would have it that Americans aren't very good at listening to one another these days. People say we're so polarized and disconnected that civil dialogue is out of the question. But again and again in the past few weeks, I've seen just the opposite:



- I saw spiritual leaders laugh and process and plan with each other the morning after the presidential election, building new connections and nurturing longstanding bonds through the **We Have to Talk** interfaith dialogue series.
- I saw people of every age and ethnicity, every faith and perspective, bring casseroles to share and stories to tell at the **Love Anyway Feast**, a local example of a national initiative bringing people together around a common meal.
- I saw community members linger long after the annual **East End Interfaith Thanksgiving service** had ended, greeting neighbors, congratulating the choir on its moving performance, sharing conversation over cookies.

On each of these occasions and many more, I heard people say, "We needed this." We needed it, like food or shelter or safety. In a complicated world, we are all so hungry for genuine connection: to hear about the world from our neighbor's perspective, to have the opportunity to ask honest questions, to share our own views and know that we are truly heard.

And our churches can be the places where that hunger is satisfied. Our churches can set the table for meaningful connection across difference, conversations that support and sustain us. This is the simple, unsung work that churches have been about for generations: nurturing the camaraderie that grows while singing hymns side by side, or building a ramp for a neighbor, or peeling potatoes for the sauerkraut supper. Churches are places where we can be known and heard, where we can feel loved, where we know we can belong.

Loneliness, Surgeon General Vivek Murthy says, is an epidemic. Over seventy years ago, Dorothy Day named the cure: "We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community." In the days to come, let's continue to nurture that essential community, one conversation at a time.

Your sister in Christ,

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



Photo by Brian Cohen

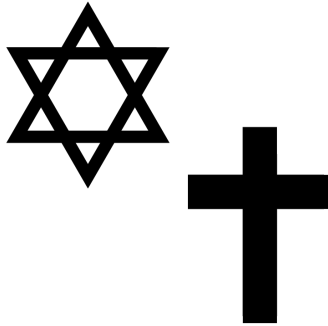
*Want even more ecumenical news and events from across Southwest Pennsylvania? Subscribe to **Unity n'At**, a monthly e-newsletter from Christian Associates! Visit casp.org/signup to be sure you're on the list.*

Longstanding Christian-Jewish Dialogue Explores Distinctions, Discovers Common Ground

Now more than ever, we need to:

- Know each other
- Understand each other
- And be inspired by each other.

You are invited to participate in a Jewish/Christian dialogue led by local Jewish and Christian faith leaders on topics of mutual interest. The meetings are once a month on the first Thursday at noon, via on Zoom for just over an hour. The dialogue is for lay people as well as clergy.



In the new year, topics will include:

- Where are the young adults?
- Isaiah's Suffering Servant
- Responding to blame for Jesus' death
- Nicene Creed and Explaining Judaism while standing on one foot

To receive monthly notifications and the Zoom link, please contact Rev. Linda Theophilus at revtheophilus@live.com or 412-401-5742.

New Faces at Christian Associates

Welcoming Student Assistant Annie Leech

Christian Associates welcomes Annie Leech as our Student Assistant in this academic year. Annie, a Fox Chapel native, is pursuing a Master of Arts in Pastoral Studies at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. She was drawn to Christian Associates after her experiences this summer as Student Minister for the Department of Religion at Chautauqua Institution. Here's a little of her story, in her own words:

"Tell me about your call" is a common invitation heard at the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. It serves as both icebreaker and orientation. As a somewhat nontraditional seminary student, I struggled with this question. "I don't think I'm called to congregational ministry," I would respond, assuming I was being asked about my post-graduation plans. It could feel discouraging, like I was listening for something I wasn't sure I would recognize.

Before starting seminary, I worked for the Detroit Symphony Orchestra as an early childhood specialist. I would visit childcare settings and lead children and their caregivers in musical experiences. "Let's make a steady beat!" I would start, encouraging everyone in the circle to listen and match the beat of those around them. As we thumped our legs, we created a pulse like a drum beat. The pulse was soft at first, then growing louder as we all found the beat. Sometimes, we would play a game where the children would hide and make a steady beat while the adults would close their eyes and make their way to the children by following the beat. The sound of the beat oriented them and directed them to where they needed to go.



Student Assistant Annie Leech

I admire people who move to the beat of the divine drummer and not that of the world. I look to the world's artists as teachers and guides. I think we have a lot to learn from people convicted enough to follow inspiration, despite our cultural definition of success. Many of the greatest masters were not recognized in their lifetimes, yet could not help but create. We are called to follow the divine beat, regardless of where it moves.

Over the last several months, my work as student assistant at Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania has allowed me to hear the steady pulse of God's call in my life. It has been a difficult season in our nation and in Pittsburgh, and yet, I can hear the beat of the divine drummer leading me to spaces where I can love anyway.

We are excited to have Annie learning and working with us this year, and we are excited for all that we will learn from her insight and discoveries.

Melanie Linn Gutowski will serve as Executive Administrative Assistant

This fall, we welcomed a familiar face back to Christian Associates: Melanie Linn Gutowski, who served as temporary administrative assistant during Erin Lane's maternity leave last year. Melanie also worked behind-the-scenes as CASP's publications editor in recent months.

A professional writer, Melanie's byline has appeared in many local publications, including NEXTpittsburgh and PublicSource. She is also a Pennsylvania Master Naturalist and conservation educator.

You can catch Melanie in the CASP office every Monday, Tuesday and Thursday, or email her at mlgutowski@casp.org.



Executive Administrative Assistant
Melanie Linn Gutowski

Thank You to Our 2024 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;
^ Participated as a sponsor in Rev. Liddy Barlow's 10th Anniversary Celebration

This list includes donations made between November 16, 2023 and November 15, 2024. Donations made after November 15 will be recognized at the end of 2025. 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. We will print the list of our 2024 judicatory sponsors in the February 2025 issue of The Call.

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What's Your Function? Help Christian Associates Make Conjunctions Happen!

The colorful cartoon train cars begin their journey as the Schoolhouse Rock harmony begins: ***“Conjunction junction, what’s your function?”*** Conjunctions, the train conductor happily informs you, are little words that connect words, clauses, or sentences.

At Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania, our work is all about conjunctions—and our favorite conjunction is ***and***. We connect Christians who are Orthodox ***and*** Catholic ***and*** Protestant, urban ***and*** rural, progressive ***and*** conservative. What’s more, we bring Christians into dialogue and shared work with our neighbors from civic ***and*** community ***and*** interfaith organizations.

And now, we are asking for your help. Will you ***give us an “and”*** as this year

ends, pledging your support for Christian unity ***and*** partnering in this essential mission of connection?

Generous donors like you help Christian Associate to make connections like these in 2024:

- Equipping clergy peacemakers to bridge the political divide in an election season
- Introducing and fostering relationship between independent and institutional churches
- Bringing together Christians and Jews to reckon with antisemitism
- and so many more ministries, all powered by our commitment to connection

Your support for this ministry ensures we can continue to make connections 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 www.casp.org/donate, where you can also learn more about our Circle of Unity monthly giving program and our John 17 Society donor recognition.

Conjunctions show that little words can make a big difference—and whether great or small, know that your contribution to Christian Associates is big blessing to our ministries!

*How good and pleasant it is
when God's people live together in unity!*

Pittsburgh Branch of Refuge for Women Offers Safety and Hope to Victims of Human Trafficking

While there are many things that make Pennsylvania a unique place, you may not realize one that's cause for concern:

Pennsylvania is a human trafficking corridor.

This is partly due to the sheer amount of transportation infrastructure in the state. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, the Commonwealth boasts 350 airports (121 public, 229 private); 23 interstate highways; 65 active railroad companies; and three shipping ports. In addition, the state borders six others, with whom we share major waterways.

Luckily, there is local help available. Refuge for Women, a national organization founded in 2009, opened its Pittsburgh location in August 2023. Its establishment marked a milestone in Western Pennsylvania's fight against human trafficking: its first emergency house. While many organizations provide services to human trafficking victims locally, none were offering residential services.

"Refuge for Women is fulfilling

that unmet need of having a residential place where [law enforcement] can bring the women," says Sarah Medina, emergency services director. "Within 24 to 48 hours, we can start wrapping around the resources that they need, whether it's through therapy, just initial

Refuge for Women

PITTSBURGH EMERGENCY HOUSING

safety of getting them to a safe place—to a bed where they can rest and start that recovery process."

"We want the women to feel like they're coming home," Medina says.

Refuge for Women is a non-profit, faith based organization providing specialized long-term care for women who have escaped human trafficking or sexual exploitation.

The program is structured in three phases. Phase one focuses on immediate physical and mental wellbeing, including

housing, food, clothing and crisis intervention. Phase two includes life skills training, personal goal setting and education. Phase three, which is optional, includes job placement, housing assistance and continued counseling. Program support for each client can last up to two years.

As of August 2024, eight women have graduated from the program in Pittsburgh, three of whom have since been reunited with their children.

The program is free to clients and is funded through a combination of individual giving, Medicaid and other third-party payments. The organization also accepts volunteers. Churches may become involved by scheduling a tour of the Emergency House, inviting RFW staff to present to your congregation, or contributing funds or Amazon wish list items. More information is available at refugeforwomen.org/pittsburgh.

In the words of one Refuge for Women client, "the work I did here—the readings, the group meetings, the therapy, the devotionals—all of that brings light into me. They replace that pain, sorrow, loss, and discomfort with love, kindness and understanding."

Pittsburgh Crèche Reminds Visitors of the Reason for the Season

Leaders from the Pittsburgh area blessed the Pittsburgh Crèche on November 21, inaugurating the annual display of this holiday landmark. Each year, between Light-Up Night (the week before Thanksgiving) and Epiphany, 250,000 people visit this replica of the nativity scene at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

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.

Planning your winter worship calendar? Looking for a change in the regular routine?

Invite Christian Associates to your pulpit or classroom!

Rev. Liddy Barlow is happy to visit your church as a guest or supply preacher, as a worship or Sunday School leader, or simply to bring greetings from Christian Associates.

Take a much-needed Sunday off and bring a message of Christian unity to your congregation. All honoraria support the mission of Christian Associates. Email lbarlow@casp.org to reserve a weekend!



Photos by Andy Muhl from the 2024 Crèche blessing



International Association of Women Ministers Plans Events for Winter & Spring

The Western Pennsylvania chapter of the International Association of Women Ministers—a global ecumenical organization founded in 1919 to promote, encourage, and celebrate women in ministry—offers monthly gatherings during the program year. Drop in when you're able or join them all!

On Thursday, January 16 at 10:30 a.m. via Zoom, the group welcomes a panel of people with disabilities and their family members for **“Increasing Accessibility.”** Learn how our churches can offer a wider welcome for all affected by disability.

February's program is **“Stepping into Retirement.”** Rev. Linda Miller-Pretz and Rev. Jean Henderson will facilitate a conversation on finding fulfillment in retirement and planning for aging. It takes place Thursday, February 20 at 10:30 a.m. via Zoom.



Members of the Western PA chapter of the International Association of Women Ministers at their 2024 retreat at Antiochian Village

Many women ministers are still blazing new ground, and on March 20 at 10:30, in person at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary or via Zoom, the group welcomes a panel of pioneering pastors serving prominent churches, in

judicatory leadership, and more, each of whom is the first woman in her role, for **“Pioneering Clergywomen of Today.”**

The group's annual overnight retreat, themed **“Living the Kin-dom,”** takes place from Wednesday, April 30 at 1 p.m. through Thursday, May 1 after lunch at Antiochian Village Conference & Retreat Center in Bolivar. This year's retreat leader is the Rev. Grace Killian, Connectional Ministries Associate for the United Methodist Church. The cost is \$200 per person with financial aid available in cases of need. For more information and to register, visit bit.ly/IAWMretreat2025.

For details on all these programs, including room locations, driving directions, and Zoom links, join the group email list by contacting wpawomenministers@gmail.com.

GUIDING THE FAITHFUL IN COMPLEX TIMES

Judaism Is About Love!

A Conversation with Rabbi Shai Held and the Rev. Dr. Jerome Creach

Feb. 11, 2025; In Person and Online

In collaboration with the Center for Loving Kindness, Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh

What Do We Do Now? Rebuilding After the Storms Have Passed

Albright-Deering Lectures in Methodist Studies

Feb. 18-19, 2025; In Person and Online

Lovett Weems, Distinguished Professor of Church Leadership and Senior Consultant of the Lewis Center for Church Leadership, Wesley Theological Seminary

Transforming Traumas: Fostering Hope and Resilience in our Neighborhoods

Kelso Lecture: March 13, 2025; In Person and Online

Keri L. Day, Professor of Constructive Theology and African American Religion
Princeton Theological Seminary

Metro-Urban Institute Conference: March 14, 2025; In Person



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Save the Date for 2025 Events

Wednesday, January 8 – We Have to Talk interfaith conversation. 11 a.m.-12:30 p.m. at the Jewish Community Center in Squirrel Hill. Meet clergy and lay leaders from across faith traditions as we build connection, understanding, and mutual support.

Tuesday, March 11 – Pittsburgh Prays conversation on youth ministry. 7-8:30 p.m. at the Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh Diocesan Center in Crafton. Join leaders from across the region who are passionate about ministry with youth and young adults as we consider how the Holy Spirit is directing our collaborative work.

Saturday, March 22 – Bread for the World Hunger Advocacy Workshop. 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at St. Mary of the Mount in Mount Washington. Find out how you and your congregation can help ensure no child goes hungry by advocating for just and merciful hunger policy on Capitol Hill.

Friday, May 2 – 25th Annual Pittsburgh Pastoral Care Conference. 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. at Christ United Methodist Church in Bethel Park. Join keynote speaker Bill Strickland, founder of Manchester Craftsmans Guild, as we explore *Making the Impossible Possible*. Discover a full slate of workshops and networking opportunities for clergy, counselors, and all others who care for souls.

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