



# PLUM

(Pittsburgh Lutheran United Ministries)

## PLUM Congregations

[www.plumofpa.com](http://www.plumofpa.com)

### **Resurrection Lutheran**

7600 Steubenville Pike  
Oakdale, PA 15071  
412-788-4513  
[rlc10380@verizon.net](mailto:rlc10380@verizon.net)

### **Bethany Lutheran (Dormont)**

3104 West Liberty Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15216  
412-531-9363  
[bethany-dormont@verizon.net](mailto:bethany-dormont@verizon.net)

### **Christ Lutheran**

405 Kennedy Avenue  
Duquesne, PA 15110  
412-466-7773  
[christluthduq@gmail.com](mailto:christluthduq@gmail.com)

### **East Liberty Lutheran**

5707 Penn Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15206  
412-362-1712  
[jcurry@shadysideacademy.org](mailto:jcurry@shadysideacademy.org)

### **Lutheran Church of Our Saviour**

1570 Clay Pike  
North Huntingdon, PA 15642  
724-863-2591  
[licos2@comcast.net](mailto:licos2@comcast.net)

### **Messiah Lutheran**

4300 Main Street  
Munhall, PA 15120  
412-461-6958  
[messiahmunhall@verizon.net](mailto:messiahmunhall@verizon.net)

### **St. Andrew Lutheran**

218 Alter Street  
East Carnegie, PA 15106  
412-279-3615  
[standrew3@aol.com](mailto:standrew3@aol.com)

### **St. Paul's Lutheran**

210 North Jefferson Ave.  
Canonsburg, PA 15317  
724-745-5962  
[stpaulscbg@verizon.net](mailto:stpaulscbg@verizon.net)

### **Hope Lutheran Church**

**(Forest Hills)**  
353 Ridge Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15221  
412-242-4476  
[hopeforesthills@aol.com](mailto:hopeforesthills@aol.com)

### **Immanuel Lutheran**

612 Chestnut Street  
Irwin, PA 15642  
724-863-7009  
No e-mail at this time

# The Parish Item

Monthly Newsletter of *East Liberty Lutheran Church*

5707 Penn Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15206-3603  
412-362-1712

Pastor John Gropp 412-466-7773

Pastor Brenda Henry 412-390-8005

Pastor Sue Devine 412-496-4889

Rev. Dr. Alexander Sumo 614-218-6730

**Our Vision:** We are all saints and sinners whose faith and lives intersect leaving judgment to God.

### **Our Mission:**

- \* Preach the gospel.
- \* Administer the sacraments.
- \* Teach God's Word
- \* Serve the community.

## Autumn 2022

**East Liberty Lutheran Church:**

**In Search of a Home**

<sup>5</sup> "Go and tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD says: Will you build a house for me to live in?' <sup>6</sup> From the time I brought the Israelites out of Egypt until now I have not lived in a house. I have been moving around all this time with a tent as my home. <sup>7</sup> As I have moved with the Israelites, I have never said to the tribes, whom I commanded to take care of my people Israel, 'Why haven't you built me a house of cedar?'"

--2 Samuel 7:5-7

<sup>20</sup> Jesus replied, 'Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.'

--Matthew 8:20

The verses above are familiar. Sometimes we feel guilty about what Jesus said. Neither God nor Jesus commanded their followers to build them spectacular buildings in their honor or in which they would dwell. Nevertheless, The Temple was built, as were synagogues; churches and cathedrals have also been built for two thousand years. These buildings were built by humans for various reasons. For us, the two most important reasons are worship and ministry.

We left 5707 Penn Avenue in March of 2020. The building was not suitable for use anymore, and thanks to Charles Honeywell, we had arranged to temporarily rent space at East End Cooperative Ministry. Two and a half years later, we are excited to be moving forward and looking for a new, permanent space in which to worship and, most importantly, from which we can do ministry in accordance with God's Will!

Lori Moran is working as our real estate agent, and she has arranged for us to visit three different sites in the past few weeks. Each has its advantages and limitations; two are rental sites and one would be ours to own.

The first building we looked at is on Penn Avenue across from the Lemieux Center and almost next door to the property where St. Lawrence O'Toole Church stood. It seems to be the right size and the owner will renovate the interior to make it habitable. We would need to do some of our own work to suit our needs. A smaller building at Penn Avenue and N. Beatty Street also has potential. It is smaller and not in need of renovation, but that means that we would need to foot the bill for our remodeling needs.

We also looked at the Messiah Lutheran Church building, as it only recently became available. It was built in 1908 and is in good structural condition. The congregation was originally an offshoot of Christ Evangelical Lutheran

The Bible says, *"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God"* (Ephesians 5:1-2 ESV).

God didn't put you on Earth to live for yourself. Instead, he put you here to learn how to be unselfish and focused on others. He made you to reflect him. We are God's instruments of generosity in the world. We're called, sent and scattered in our communities and society to be God's agents of hope, peace and love. That's generosity!

How are you imitating the generosity of Jesus today? Each time you're generous with your time, vocation, talent, career, money, influence, or love, you begin to look more and more like him.

Pastor Alexander Sumo  
On behalf of the PLUM Pastoral Team



## PLUM NEWS

### **Monday, November 28 PLUM Board Meeting**

The monthly PLUM Board meeting will be held on **Monday, November 28, at 7:00 p.m.** via **Zoom**.

Join using Zoom the same way that you have for Worship or Bible Study this past week:

**Zoom online:** <https://zoom.us/j/401596541>

**Zoom by phone:** Call (646) 876-9923. When prompted, enter the Meeting ID: **401 596 541**

of joy, knowing that God is always generous in providing for your needs. After all, he's already given you the greatest gift of all, the gift of salvation through his Son, Jesus Christ.

I know it is difficult to be generous in a society that values materialism and hoarding (or individual acquisition of things) but I've come to know that amazing transformation takes place when you live generously in every area of your life. The grip of materialism starts to break, and your heart grows bigger.

But something even greater happens: You become like Jesus.

What is Jesus like? One of his characteristics is his outrageous, lavish, and radical generosity. Everything you have—the air and water, your brain and heartbeat, all your organs—is a total gift of God's generosity. In fact, without God's generosity, you'd have nothing.

Jesus is the master example of generosity. The Bible says, "*You are familiar with the generosity of our Master, Jesus Christ. Rich as he was, he gave it all away for us—in one stroke he became poor, and we became rich*" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

What does that verse mean? Jesus Christ is God. He had all the splendor of heaven, but he gave it up and came to Earth to be born in a barn. That's about as low as a person could go. Why did he do it? He certainly didn't do it for himself. Jesus did it for you. It was the ultimate act of generosity: "*God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son*" (John 3:16 ESV).

So why does God want you to live generously? Because he wants you to be like him, and that means he wants you to be generous!

Church, one of the churches that merged to form ELLC in 1964, and Pastor Beth Siefert served her internship there in 1980. The SWPA Synod owns the property now and has provided us with information that we will need to review as we continue our work.

While we continue the process of visiting and evaluating potential sites for worship and ministry, we will not be idle. At our Council Work Day on October 29, we made plans to move forward with some ministry initiatives. We can rent additional space at EECM, and we have other possible event sites that we can obtain through Eddie Lesoon. It feels good to be looking to the future and being active in the Name of Christ. There will be opportunities for all of us to support these efforts in various ways, of course. Let's keep praying for guidance from the Holy Spirit as we go forth in proclaiming God's Word and doing His Will!

--Jack Curry

### **What a Fellowship! What a Joy Devine!**

On Saturday, November 12, ELLC sponsored a luncheon to celebrate the sale of our property. It coincided nicely with our yearly congregational anniversary celebration—so many blessings to enjoy and for which we are very thankful!

We gathered at *Friendship Perk and Brew* at 2:30 PM to enjoy a delicious meal, after which we shared memories and stories of church life at 5707 Penn Avenue. All the PLUM pastors were present, including Pastor Gropp and Pastor Koch, along with their lovely wives! Pastor Mayforth, Pastor and Mrs. Rafanan, and Janet and John Craig were also there. Pastor Beth Siefert was unable to attend but sent a letter which Jack Curry read to the crowd. We filled the place to capacity (and maybe a few more than that!), and we shared laughter and a few poignant moments as well.

The East Liberty Chamber of Commerce was represented by Blyden O. Terry, who thanked Pastor John and ELLC for the prayers to God asking for healing when he was near death nine years ago. Lori Moran read a letter on behalf of the Chamber in which she expressed gratitude to the congregation, to Pastor Long, and to Charles Honeywell, for the ministry and work that supported the revitalization of East Liberty that continues today.

We give thanks to God that the long process of selling the church property ended successfully, and we pray for the future of the congregation in continuing its ministry for many years to come.



(PLUM). We assembled on September 10, 2022, at Christ Lutheran Church in Duquesne, Pennsylvania to package food for needy people around the world. We packaged thousands of meals for RISE AGAINST HUNGER for shipment to people across the United States and around the world. Funds for the purchase, packaging and shipment of these meals came from members of the PLUM churches. These people, like the Macedonian church, have their own financial needs and are living in an economy that is plagued by inflation and being hurt by a deadly pandemic but chose to give their resources, energy and time for the good of others. This is true generosity! And that's where truly happiness is found.

It is praiseworthy to note how all PLUM congregations are giving back to their communities and doing exceptional ministries with their neighbors. All our congregations are doing phenomenal ministries. A few days ago, I was at the Blessed Bundles event at Lutheran Church of Savior in North Huntingdon. It is an excellent engagement with the community that is touching many lives. I see why most people in PLUM are happy. WE ARE GIVERS! Thank you everyone!

The Bible says, *“There is more happiness in giving than in receiving”* (Acts 20:35 GNT).

When I was a kid, I didn't believe that verse. I was immature and thought it was more fun to GET than to GIVE. And Christmas was always about me: “What am I going to get?”

But as my parents taught me the value of generosity, I began to experience the joy that comes from giving. I slowly began to mature and understand there really is more joy in giving than receiving.

Maybe you find yourself giving out of pressure or compulsion—and you're miserable. Try this instead: Give out

## Givers Are the Happiest People

When it comes to generosity, one of the best ways to learn is from the examples of others.

I learned how to be generous from my parents, especially my mother. I grew up watching my mother give away so many things in life. She gave away her life, love, income, happiness, comfort, joy and food. She gave away time, talent, energy, and effort. She held out her gifts and resources with an open hand, and she is one of the most joyful people I have ever known.

The Bible offers another great model of generosity: the church in Macedonia. Here's what the apostle Paul said about them: *"We want you to know what God's grace has accomplished in the churches in Macedonia. They have been severely tested by the troubles they went through; but their joy was so great that they were extremely generous in their giving, even though they are very poor"* (2 Corinthians 8:1-2 GNT).

Notice how the church in Macedonia had their own problems to deal with. They were "severely tested" because they lived during the Roman Empire, when Nero was emperor. It was a time when being a Christian could lead to a death sentence. The Macedonians were not only being persecuted for their faith, but they were also extremely poor and maybe in need of financial assistance themselves.

But because "their joy was so great," their difficult circumstances didn't stop them from being "extremely generous in their giving." They didn't give out of duty or obligation. They gave out of joy.

A few weeks ago, I was elated when I participated in a service event with members of Pittsburgh Lutheran United Ministries



Thanks to Susan Smith and Marie Bishop for their hard work in planning this wonderful event. Thanks also to Nick Redondo, owner of *Friendship Perk and Brew*, and to his wonderful, friendly staff who took good care of us all!

## *Changing Seasons*

Dear Partners in Christ,

Can you believe it is Fall? Where did the Summer go? It may have gone by quickly; however, we had much to celebrate this summer. We had the opportunity to meet Pastor Alex as each congregation held a fellowship time either before or after worship. We had a grand celebration at his installation where we met his family and treasured friends from his time in Ohio and his birthplace, Liberia. We also spent time together with three in-person potluck gatherings at Dormont Park, Settlers Cabin Park, and White Oak Park.

We have also entered a season of praying continually for Pastor John, our beloved sibling who is experiencing health concerns from an advanced case of Lyme disease. We

are grateful for every day that his health improves. We are trusting God's healing touch to strengthen and sustain Pastor John as he recovers.

As we make the switch to Fall, we are restarting the narrative lectionary that has been the selection of our scripture passages this past four years. When we began in 2018, it was new and foreign to have such long passages of scripture. Over time we have come to appreciate the unfolding stories that allow us time to journey through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation with a particular focus on one of the Gospels each year.

This year it is the Gospel of Matthew. Additionally, we are reading and discussing Bishop Kusserow's book, *What is the Gospel*, Thursday evenings at 8 pm on zoom or at individual congregations as part of in-person Bible studies or fellowship time.

We are also making the shift in living with COVID. It remains a concern. And yet the gripping terror that first assailed us in 2020 at the thought of COVID is being replaced with an awareness that it is here to stay. So too is the need for our caring actions towards another...we continue to pray for each other when someone succumbs to it and encourage individuals to stay home when ill.

Yes, the days are once again getting shorter and the evenings cooler. And we are growing in our maturity of dealing with the ebb and flow that our journey is taking us on. Father Richard Rohr shared in his meditation *A Ripening Mind and Heart*, a concept called ripening. It is a process he describes for aging well. The transition we make from being anxious about everything to an awareness of patient learning. Here is how he applied it to our spirituality:

*“If we are to speak of a spirituality of ripening, we need to recognize that it is always characterized by an increasing tolerance for ambiguity, a growing sense of subtlety, an ever-larger ability to include and allow, and a capacity to live with contradictions and even to love them! I cannot imagine any other way of coming to those broad horizons except through many trials, unsolvable paradoxes, and errors in trying to resolve them.”<sup>1</sup>*

Together we are learning this process of ripening. As individuals, as a ministry and as a community we are coming to terms with adapting and adjusting to the changes. May we continue to be guided by the instructions Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica on how to faithfully navigate this journey:

*Be joyful always,  
pray continually;  
give thanks in all circumstances,  
for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.  
(1Thessalonians 5:16-18, NIV)*

In service together,  
*Pastor Brenda*

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Rohr, “A Ripening Mind and Heart,” Center for Action and Contemplation, September 18, 2022, accessed September 18, 2022, <https://cac.org/daily-meditations/a-ripening-mind-and-heart-2022-09-18/>.