

Sixth Sense



Dear Sixth Family,

While the weather outside has been frightful, I am reminded daily of the warmth and resilience of this community. I hope you are all staying warm and safe as we dig ourselves out from the massive snow that closed out our January! As we turn the calendar page to February, we find ourselves settling into the rhythm of this new year. The excitement of the holidays and the fresh start of January have transitioned into the steady, faithful work of being a community together.

With the first month of 2026 behind us, we are settling into the rhythm of our life together. It has been a joy to witness new energy taking root in our ministries. I'm especially excited about our upcoming young adult get-together (*see page 2*). Seeing this group come together to connect, share, and support one another is a beautiful testament to how we are growing and making space for everyone at Sixth.

While we are still in the season of Epiphany — guided by the light of the "star words" many of you received last month — we are also looking ahead toward the season of Lent. Later this month, we will mark Ash Wednesday and begin our journey toward Easter. This season invites us to pause, reflect, and perhaps look at those star words with fresh eyes as we consider how God is calling us to grow during these sacred weeks.

With gratitude and hope,
Pastor Charissa

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rev. Dr. Charissa Dowd-Horne".

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

Starting Ash Wednesday, please stop by our table in the sanctuary for devotional materials to journey through the Lenten season at home. Using SanctifiedArt as a resource, our theme for Lent and Easter is entitled, "Tell Me Something Good".

E-version Available Now!

Our friends at A Sanctified Art have provided a special e-reader version of this year's Lenten devotional, which you can access on your computer and mobile devices: online.flippingbook.com/view/546389771/. In order to protect their work, please refrain from sharing this link or posting it on social media.

Daily Lenten Devotional

If you would like a daily Lenten devotional email, please send your email address to Jenny Newman at Jennyrunew@gmail.com by Feb. 18th (Ash Wednesday).

February 2026

WORSHIP

February 8th:
Coffee Hour

February 15th:
Transfiguration of the Lord

February 18th:
Ash Wednesday
Meal at 6pm; 7pm worship service

February 22nd:
First Sunday in Lent

March 1st:
Second Sunday in Lent
Communion and Coffee Hour

February Youth

(7th-12th)



Weekly Youth Group

Thursdays - 4:30 to 7 p.m.

Dinner is served at 5.

Join us as we gather with our friends from East Liberty Presbyterian Church to share a meal, fellowship and Bible Study.

Contact: Jenny Newman

Jennyrunew@gmail.com

412-720-6392

Feb. 5 @ELPC -

We are going Ice Skating at Schenley Park. We will meet ELPC at the usual time and take the ELPC van to skate in the park. The public skating session is from 6:30 to 8:30. We will arrive back at the church at 8:45.



Feb. 12 @ELPC

Feb. 19 @ELPC

Feb. 26 @Sixth Church



young adult gathering

Sixth Church friends beyond
high school - 30ish are invited
to meet together for
fellowship and conversation.
Invite a friend and let's
connect!



5:30 -8 p.m.

Monday, Feb. 9th



Pastoli's

1900 Murray Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA
15217



Contact Jenny Newman for more info

Jennyrunew@gmail.com

Sixth Presbyterian Church- Session Highlights

Wednesday, January 28, 2026

The meeting was conducted via ZOOM due to weather conditions.

CALL TO ORDER/DEVOTIONAL TIME: The meeting began shortly after 7 with prayer and discussion about current events concerns.

CLERK'S REPORT:

- Worship: (In Person/You Tube - (In Person/You Tube) - 12/21/25 (110/51); 12/24 Christmas Eve (140/63); 12/28 (56/37); 1/4/26 (84/40); 1/11 (83/29); 1/18 (97/30); 1/25 (/98) No in-person due to weather
- Presbytery Meeting Schedule, 2026
 - Thursday, February 12-Virtual Meeting via Zoom at 1:00 p.m.-**Elder Tom Twiss approved to attend**
 - Thursday, April 30-Pittsburgh Theological Seminary at 1:00 p.m. **Elder Twiss will attend**
 - Thursday, October 1-Crestfield Camp and Conference Center at 10:00 a.m.
 - Thursday, December 10-TBD at 1:00 p.m.
- Baptisms-Rowan and Violet Zeglin were baptized on December 28, 2025
- Coffee Hour Schedule 2026 will be shared with committee/working group chairs
- Correspondence
 - Update and request for contributions from More Light Presbyterians, Inc.

PASTOR'S REPORT:

- Congregational Meeting will be held Sunday, February 1, 2026.
- Pastor Charissa plans to reach out to committee/working group chairs for committee restructuring thoughts and updates.
- Lent planning is in progress. Most activities/services will remain much the same. Pastor Charissa plans to be in touch with other churches in the neighborhood to coordinate some activities/services.
- Pastor Charissa hopes to coordinate with Christian Ed to hold ZOOM meetings with varied groups of those of various ages, experiences, lifestyles, etc. to discuss historical differences, commonalities- whatever topics of interest

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:

- **FINANCE:** Elder Beth Hazlett presented the draft budget for 2026. After some discussion and adjustments, the budget was approved.
- **PERSONNEL:** Elder Sara DeLucia reported that the annual reviews are in progress.
- **HOUSE:** Elder Leslie Kaplan reported that the heat in the sanctuary has been fixed, so it is much warmer.

COMMITTEE/WORKING GROUP REPORTS were reviewed

COFFEE HOUR SCHEDULE:

- February 8-Choir-moved from February 1 due to weather and Congregational Meeting
- March 1-Peace & Justice/Church & Community

NEXT MEETING: February 25, 2026, 7 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT & CLOSING PRAYER: The meeting was closed with prayer at 9:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathi Robinson-Dassel, Clerk of Session



The Sixth Sense newsletter comes out on the first Wednesday of the month.

The deadline for March newsletter submissions is: Friday, February 27th.

Please email articles and announcements to the church office at officesixthchurch@gmail.com.

You can also put printed copies on the office desk.

Thanks you!



February Birthdays

Feb 2	Chris Berg	Feb 18	Brenda Jordan John McCall
Feb 3	Doris Bell	Feb 19	Greg Cooper
Feb 9	Kit Ayers	Feb 21	Linda May
Feb 10	Beth Hazlett	Feb 23	Diane James
Feb 14	Peter Kaplan Shay Carter McGraw	Feb 26	Jan Myers-Newbury Amy Whipple
Feb 15	Kathleen Myers		
Feb 16	Maria Guyette		



We are an open and affirming community of faith in Jesus Christ. At home in an urban neighborhood of many faiths, we acknowledge that we are not alone on the path to understanding God. In worship, study, and fellowship, we celebrate our Presbyterian roots and find joy in our diversity. We strive for the grace to love one another as we seek a deeper understanding of life in the Spirit, working for justice and serving as stewards of God's wondrous creation.

2025 Annual Reports

Our committees & action groups serve diligently throughout the year, offering their time and talents to do their best by Sixth. Please enjoy reading over their annual reports.

Pastor's Report

It's hard to believe that 2025 has come to a close. I began 2025 with the promise of a neutral pulpit and the possibility of becoming your next installed pastor. I'm delighted to have closed it out well along the journey together. Since May 19th, here's a snapshot of the work we've been up to together.

Administrative and Operational

- My Service of Installation was approved and held on Sunday, September 14th, at 4:00pm in the Sanctuary.
- In the fall, the session moved to re-configure the committee make up, limiting the number of committees that require session seats, but keeping all of our passionate and active teams in place. There will be more congregation-wide information on this coming in early 2026. The key takeaway is that this new configuration will streamline communication channels, as well as provide some new in-roads for new members and friends who would like to get more involved.
- A phased review of the Administrative Manual was proposed, starting with Staff, then committees, and finally Session, with the goal of completing the update by Fall 2026. We will begin diving into this work in full force in February.
- A proposal was made to digitize old minutes books from the office closet and send them to the Presbyterian Historical Society for free, secure safekeeping; this closet/minutes cleanout began as an ongoing project with Kathi.
- I have had the joy of celebrating communion with you all 10 times over our 7 1/2 months together.
- It was a delight to celebrate a new member and two baptisms in December.

Pastoral, Worship, and Programs

- Pastoral Care focused on getting to know leaders (elders and deacons), reaching out to those on the diaconate visitation list, and connecting with potential new members, in addition to ongoing care like birthday cards and outreach to members on care lists.
- Worship Highlights included the funeral of Margaret Miller (August 2nd), World Communion Sunday (October 5th), All Saints' Sunday (November 2nd), Christ the King Sunday (November 23rd) combined with a Family Christmas Movie, and the Christmas Eve Candlelight service (December 24th, 6:45 pm).
- Advent and Christmas activities involved planning with staff, an Advent materials distribution and movie night/potluck (Nov 30th), the "Make the Yuletide Gay" event (Dec 8th), and Lessons & Carols (Dec 28th).
- Time Off included a vacation from June 13th-29th, and attendance at the Pittsburgh Presbytery Pastor retreat (Sept. 30th-Oct. 2nd) and an annual weekend retreat (Oct. 10th-12th).

Presbytery and Justice Involvement

- Presbytery engagement included attending the Presbytery meeting at Crestfield (Sept 30th-Oct 2nd) and attending the December 11th meeting virtually due to illness. In 2026, I will be serving on the Presbytery's Anti-Racism Transformation Team (ARTT).

- Justice and Peace Work included the CeaseFire PA rally on September 4th and the "No Kings" event in October.. I joined the rapid response team after Casa San Jose Training and participated in events on topics like "Gaza: What's Next?" and interfaith dialogue with our Jewish friends and neighbors.

Perhaps the most important highlight is that as we wrap up one year and welcome the next, I find myself grateful to be walking alongside a congregation that is so engaged with inclusion, justice, and compassion. I find Sixth gracious and have appreciated such a warm welcome. I look forward to seeing what our first full calendar year together looks like.

Prayerfully submitted,

Rev. Dr. Charissa Howe



Our New Committee Structure

- **Executive Committee:** Meets with moderator prior to session meetings, and for specially called meetings, as deemed necessary
 - ◊ **House Committee**
 - ◊ **Finance Committee**
 - ◊ **Personnel Committee**
- **Seasonal committees:** Do not meet/work all year
 - ◊ **Stewardship Committee**
 - ◊ **Nominating Committee**
- **Spiritual Formations Committee:** Oversees the worship and spiritual growth of the church and works closely with the Pastor, Christian Education Director, and Music Director.
 - ◊ Worship volunteers/subcommittee
 - ◊ Christian Education subcommittee
- **Community Engagement Committee**
 - ◊ Welcome & Growth
 - ◊ Fellowship
 - ◊ Communications
- **Mission/outreach Committee**
 - ◊ Church & Community Subcommittee
 - ◊ Peace & Justice action group
 - ◊ More Light action group
 - ◊ Gun Safety action group

Christian Education

We have had another busy and life-giving year in Christian Education ministry at Sixth Church. What follows is a brief snapshot of the year rather than a comprehensive account. These highlights reflect representative moments and ministries that show how Christian Education is lived out in our community. Many faithful acts of teaching, learning, care, and relationship-building take place week by week and remain central to the life of our congregation, even when not named here.

Christian Education is woven into every aspect of our congregation's life. Children are always welcome in worship, and it matters deeply to us that they know they are a valued part of our community of faith. We include young people in worship through music, pageants, and opportunities for service and leadership. Childcare and Extended Session time are provided during worship by dedicated staff who help children experience prayer, stories, music, and creative play. Seasonal resources encourage faith formation at home and beyond our church walls, while additional offerings—such as book studies, lectures, short-term classes, and community engagement—invite all ages to grow in faith, seek justice, and live as stewards of God's creation.

On Sunday mornings, we are blessed with terrific Sunday School teachers, including Joe Ashenden and Linda May, as well as Marcus Robinson, Julie Caryl, and Rae Hodge. Our childcare staff care for our youngest members during Extended Session and support Sunday School. This year our staff included Kate Smith, Asa Parkhurst, and Enrico Grammaroli, and this fall we welcomed Eve Guyette and Bea Tantalo as youth staff members. Together, these creative and caring individuals engage our children with warmth, consistency, and hospitality.

Highlights from 2025

• **Collaboration with East Liberty Presbyterian Church:**

Our partnership with ELPC continues to be a joy and a blessing in youth ministry and Vacation Church School. Working together allows us to combine resources and offer meaningful opportunities for fellowship, learning, and service, including weekly youth gatherings, mission experiences, and VCS. A key goal this year was increasing service and community outreach. Youth provided meals for residents of the Ronald McDonald House, worked at Garfield Community Farm, volunteered with Reading Ready Pittsburgh and the Chapel Market at ELPC, and assembled care packages for Sixth Church deacons' outreach.



- **Triennium:** In July, I had the pleasure of co-leading a delegation of youth from Pittsburgh Presbytery – including Sixth Church youth Eve Guyette – to the PC(USA) Triennium National Youth Conference in Louisville, Kentucky.

- **Youth Mission Giving:** Youth continue to serve as decision-makers in Sixth Church's annual mission giving through the Church and Communities Committee. Students in grades 6–12 researched local organizations and discussed community needs most important to them. They chose to support Reading Ready Pittsburgh, Foster Love Pittsburgh, The Hugh Lane Wellness Foundation, and Hello Neighbor – programs that directly serve local young people and families.

- **Meditation Grant Program:** Our Extended Session students and staff participated in a children's spirituality research group through the Real Kids, Real Faith project of Union Presbyterian Seminary. As part of this research, we spent six weeks exploring meditations written for young children, with a particular focus on social justice.

- **Education and Community Building:** This year included CPR and Stop the Bleed training for congregation members, summer park gatherings, seasonal events such as movie nights, and Advent and Lent resources. I was also part of the team that welcomed performing artists Flamy Grant, Crys Matthews, and Heather Mae for the "Make the Yuletide Gay" holiday concert.

- **Leadership, Professional Service, and Continuing Education:** I continue to provide support to staff and committees, contribute to worship planning, and step in wherever needed to strengthen the overall ministry of the church. This year also included meaningful opportunities for continuing education and service to the wider church. In addition to attending events and workshops offered by the Pittsburgh Presbytery Next Generation Committee, I participated in a year-long learning cohort for pastors and Christian educators, hosted by Union Presbyterian Seminary, which met monthly for reading and reflection. Another significant project was serving on the local hosting committee for the Association of Partners in Christian Education's national conference, held in Pittsburgh in January 2026.

A new adventure began for me in September when I was accepted into the Master of Arts in Christian Education program at Union Presbyterian Seminary, with an award covering 80% of the cost of the degree. Through online classes, hybrid seminars, and limited on-campus sessions, I plan to complete the program in spring 2027. After nearly 25 years in Christian Education ministry, I am grateful for the opportunity to continue learning and to bring new insights back into the life of Sixth Church.

Across all of these ministries: teaching, worship, service, partnership, and learning we trust that God is continually forming us as Christ's body. Christian Education at Sixth Church is not confined to classrooms or age groups; it is the shared work of nurturing faith, practicing love of neighbor, and responding together to God's ongoing call in the world.



CHURCH AND COMMUNITY

Sixth Presbyterian Church contributes a significant share of its financial resources to help alleviate human needs. The Church and Community Committee (C&C) plays a major role in Sixth Church's mission giving. We have developed a process for mission giving which is distinctive in three ways.

- First, we allocate most of the Church's mission funds using a scoring system, described below, which C&C created, and which we have adjusted over several years based on experience.
- Second, we allocate a substantial portion of funds to advocacy groups that work on a range of issues at the local, state, national and international levels.
- Third, we offer our Youth Group the opportunity to allocate a small but meaningful portion of our mission funds to groups that they choose.

Sixth Church is proud of its generosity. Each year, the congregation devotes roughly 10% of its total budget to mission, of which 40% is given to the mission programs of our denomination and the remaining 60% is allocated to "Locally Directed Missions", a fund which C&C manages. The Locally Directed Missions budget for 2025 was \$31,000. Of this amount, \$800 was set aside for the Youth Group and the remaining \$30,200 was divided in the manner described below.

In recent years, we have dedicated 60% of the Locally Directed Missions budget to advocacy groups that are working to create a more peaceful, just, and sustainable world, and 40% to organizations who directly address human needs. Last year, reacting to the Federal government's severe cuts in human services, housing, and food assistance, C&C voted to reduce the advocacy portion of C&C giving from 60% to 50%. This was a difficult decision, and the vote to make the change was not unanimous.

The advocacy funds are allocated as follows:

- One half goes into an advocacy pool that C&C distributes to advocacy organizations dealing with a variety of issues using the scoring process described below.
- The other half is divided evenly between the four church committees which are engaged in work for change – Earth Care, Gun Safety, More Light, and the Peace & Justice Group. These committees meet and decide how to allocate their respective shares.

The funds which directly address human needs are allocated as follows:

- Three quarters of these funds go into a direct assistance pool that C&C distributes to organizations providing help to people in need, using the scoring process described below.
- One quarter goes into a "Rainy Day" fund to address urgent humanitarian situations that arise during the year. C&C votes on how to allocate these funds based on suggestions from C&C members.

Each year, C&C invites Church members to propose organizations for funding from the advocacy and direct assistance pools. Church members prepare written reports on the organizations they propose for review by C&C. The reports describe each organization's mission and accomplishments.

The reports also provide the information needed to score each organization on the following four criteria: 1) whether or not they are faith-based; 2) the level of active participation of Sixth Church members in the organization; 3) the percent of people of color on the organization's Board of Directors; and 4) the organization's need for the funds Sixth Church can provide, with less revenue equated to greater need.

Some of the organizations that receive funds through the advocacy and direct assistance pools face diverse challenges and therefore engage in both advocacy and direct assistance. These “hybrid” organizations are scored both as advocacy and direct assistance organizations and receive a composite score.

Based on the resulting scores, C&C Chair Tom Twiss calculates the allocations for each of the advocacy, direct assistance, and hybrid organizations. The C&C Committee reviews the scores and then votes on whether to accept as presented, or to modify the score-based allocations.

The following 3 tables show the allocations that C&C made to organizations that focus on advocacy and direct assistance, and to hybrid organizations. These organizations received the combined amount of \$19,630.00.

Advocacy Organizations:

Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Center https://sabeel.org/	\$1,677.78
Pittsburghers for Public Transit https://www.pittsburghforpublictransit.org/	\$1,342.22
Pittsburgh United https://pittsburghunited.org	\$1,006.67
Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania https://housingalliancepa.org/	\$671.11

Direct Assistance Organizations:

Fishes and Loaves Cooperative Ministries https://fishes-and-loaves-hazelwood.org/	\$2,543.16
Lazarus Fund of Pittsburgh Presbytery https://www.pghpresbytery.org/justiceministries/lazarusfund/	\$2,543.16
MHY Family Services https://mhyfamilyservices.org	\$1,695.44
Wilkinsburg Community Ministries https://wcm15221.org/	\$1,695.44

Hybrid Organizations:

Church World Service https://cwsglobal.org/	\$1,898.54
El Porvenir Cooperative *see note at the end of this report	\$1,898.54
Casa San José https://www.casasanjose.org/	\$1,730.76
Just Harvest https://www.justharvest.org/	\$927.19

As noted earlier, half of the C&C’s advocacy funds are divided evenly between the Earth Care, Gun Safety, More Light Committees, and the Peace & Justice Group. In 2025 each of these groups decided how they would use their shares of C&C funding. Each committee received \$1,887.50, for a total of \$7,550. The following 4 tables show how each of the committees used these resources.

Earth Care:

Penn Future https://www.pennfuture.org	\$630.00
Three Rivers Waterkeeper https://www.threeriverswaterkeeper.org	\$630.00
Garfield Community Farm https://www.garfieldfarm.com	\$627.50

Gun Safety:

CeaseFire PA https://www.ceasefirepa.org	\$1,000.00
South Pittsburgh Peacemakers https://www.southpittsburghcoalitionforpeace.org	\$737.50
Everytown for Gun Safety https://www.everytown.org/	\$150.00

More Light:

Shepherd Wellness Community https://qburgh.com/directory/shepherd-wellness-community	\$562.00
SisTers PGH https://www.sisterspgh.org	\$562.00
Waverly Presbyterian Church/Donation to LAMP (LGBTQIA+ Affirming Ministries of Pittsburgh) - no website	\$562.00
Kept in reserve to pay up to 2 speakers honoraria	\$200.00
\$1.50 unallocated, to be returned to the general fund along with any unspent honoraria funds at the end of the fiscal year.	\$1.50

Peace and Justice Group:

Honorarium for 2024 Palestine Program	\$100.00
Casa San José https://www.casasanjose.org/	\$893.75
2025 Gaza Program	\$893.75

As noted above, 25% of the funds which directly address human needs (\$3,020) were allocated to the "Rainy Day" fund to address urgent humanitarian situations that arise during the year. The following table shows how C&C Committee voted to use these resources.

Rainy Day Fund

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees https://www.unrwausa.org/	\$1,510.00
Church World Service https://cwsglobal.org/	\$1,510.00

As stated earlier, one of the unique aspects of the Sixth Church program of mission giving is that we offer our Youth Group the opportunity to allocate a portion of our mission funds. Over the years, the Youth Group has taken great care in choosing which organizations to support. Moreover, they have provided a different and highly valuable perspective to our mission giving. In recognition of the Youth Group's excellent work, the C&C Committee voted to increase its share of Locally Directed Missions budget from \$600 to \$800. The following table shows the organizations that the Youth Group voted to support in 2025.

Youth Group:

Foster Love Project Pittsburgh https://www.fosterloveproject.org/	\$200.00
Reading Ready Pittsburgh https://www.readingreadypittsburgh.org/	\$200.00
Hugh Lane Wellness Foundation https://hughlane.org/	\$200.00
Hello Neighbor Pittsburgh https://www.helloneighbor.io/	\$200.00

Presbyterian Special Offerings

C&C is responsible for promoting donations by to the Presbyterian Special Offerings sponsored by our denomination. Historically, Sixth Church focused on two of these special offerings – the **One Great Hour of Sharing** and the **Christmas Joy Offering**. In 2025, C&C resumed collecting the **Peace and Global Witness Offering**.

The **One Great Hour of Sharing**, collected during the Easter season, supports efforts to relieve hunger through the Presbyterian Hunger Program, promotes development through the Presbyterian Committee on the Self-Development of People, and helps in areas of disaster through Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. Members and friends of Sixth Church donated **\$2,041** to this offering in 2025.

The **Peace and Global Witness Offering** is normally collected at the time of World Communion Sunday in the Fall, but Sixth decided to collect the offering in May to avoid a conflict with the CROP Walk. This offering promotes the peace of Christ by addressing systems of conflict and injustice throughout the world. Members and friends of Sixth Church donated **\$1,047** to this offering in 2025.

The **Christmas Joy Offering**, collected during Advent, provides support for Presbyterian church workers and their families in their time of need. The second focus of the Joy Offering is support for Presbyterian racial and ethnic colleges and high schools. Members of Sixth Church donated **\$1,140** to this offering in 2025

The CROP Hunger Walk

Although it is not part of the C&C Committee, no discussion of Sixth Church's mission activities can leave out our congregation's participation in the East End CROP Walk. Each year, many Sixth Church members walk in and donate to the CROP Walk, a nationwide movement sponsored by Church World Service to raise funds to end hunger and poverty in the U.S. and around the world. For many years, Sue Koehler has led our CROP Walk effort, and more recently Pamela Twiss has been co-leader of this effort.

The 2025 East End CROP Walk raised a record amount of **\$44,396**, including **\$12,550** in donations from Sixth Church members and friends, who more than doubled their donations from 2024! One important reason for this record year was the tragic reduction in national and especially international food aid being provided by our Federal government.

Three quarters of the funds raised by the East End CROP are allocated to Church World Service, and the remaining 25% is donated to the Wilkinsburg Community Ministry.

Note On El Porvenir

El Porvenir (The Future) is an agricultural cooperative located in the mountains of northwestern Nicaragua. In past years, many members of Sixth Church visited El Porvenir, but our visits are now barred by the Sandinista government, which has also revoked El Porvenir's coffee export license for political reasons. We provide modest but important financial help to this struggling community.

As we look forward to 2026, we welcome you to join in the work of the Church and Community Committee. Please contact Tom Twiss (ttwiss@pitt.edu) or Peter Kaplan (pghpeter9@gmail.com) to get involved!

This report was prepared by Peter Kaplan.

DEACONS

The Deacons' mission is to care for church and community. The current Deacons are Marnie Ber-tolet, Robin Holtje, Gail Luley, Peter Watt-Morse, April Clisura, Elizabeth McGuier, Greg Winner, Brenda Flores, and Eve Guyette.

Lazarus Fund

The Lazarus Fund is a mission of the Presbyterian Church that provides direct financial assistance to individuals in Allegheny County. Individuals can apply for help with housing-related needs, including rent, mortgage payments, security deposits, and utilities. Grants are provided on a first-come, first-serve basis to anyone who is eligible and paid directly to the landlord, bank, or utility company. Sixth's Lazarus grants are managed by Deacon April Clisura, volunteer Gwen Harcar, and Presbytery liaison Jason Shifflet.

The Lazarus Fund is primarily funded by the Presbytery. Donations from individual churches like Sixth are sent to the Presbytery, which then evenly disburses these funds to participating churches to distribute to individual recipients. We do not know how many other churches are giving to the Lazarus Fund. There are 4-5 other churches that make grants, with none being north of the three rivers. The Lazarus Fund at Sixth also receives additional money from our Church & Community Committee and Deacons fund. For example, the Deacons voted to make \$2,400 available for Lazarus use this summer because Presbytery had no funding available after the May disbursement. There was no funding available to the Presbytery until early December. Presbytery made an emergency call for funds to its churches at that time because of SNAP being affected and the government shutdown. A goal was established between Sixth and the Presbytery in 2024 of receiving about \$19,000 a year, but that goal remains out of reach because the donations coming into Presbytery are not enough to meet the need.

In 2025, we distributed approximately \$9000 to 24 individuals. The maximum amount is \$400, and the average grant was \$377. This is less than previous years because of reduced disbursements from the Presbytery. Most Sixth recipients are Black/African American women, with and without children. The most common need is support for rent, followed by electric and water bills. Lazarus grants usually cover 50-90% of what the person owes.

[We need your help!](#) Those applying have pressing needs and we want to distribute funds as quickly as possible. The process includes a phone call to verify eligibility and offer an acknowledgment of the challenges applicants are facing. The more people who can assist with this part of the process, the quicker we can distribute funds. If you are willing to help, please contact April Clisura or email lazarusfundspc@gmail.com. You can also make a financial contribution through eGive by selecting "Lazarus Fund" in the fund dropdown list.

Care List

As part of the Deacons' ministry to care for the church, we maintain a list of church members who may need additional attention or assistance as they navigate a difficult season of life. Care provided by the Deacons may include in-person visits, phone check-ins, prayers, meals, and help with transportation. Only the Deacons, Sessions, and Pastor Charissa know who is on the Care List. If you or someone you know would benefit from the Deacons' care, please let us know by emailing office-sixthchurch@gmail.com or talking with Pastor Charissa.

Care Closet

Sixth Church maintains a “care closet” to help meet the needs of those in our neighborhood. It includes non-perishable food items, toiletries, clothing, bus passes, and gift cards to local businesses. The care closet is supported by donations of items and money from the Deacons’ fund.

Meals for the Hungry and Care Pack Distribution

In past years, the Deacons partnered with the Hot Metal Bridge Faith Community to serve meals to the hungry and distribute “care packs” of toiletries and other helpful items. At the end of 2024, the Hot Metal community relocated from the Southside to Hazelwood and placed its building up for sale. Meals and distribution of care packs were suspended as the Deacons looked for new ways to contribute. In March 2025, Steel City Table, a ministry of The Table Church, announced it had purchased the building on the South Side from the Hot Metal Bridge Church and would begin serving meals in June. The Deacons carefully considered the pros and cons of partnering with this ministry, given our differences in theology and values (Table Church is affiliated with the Global Methodist Church, a more conservative denomination that opposes same-sex marriage and non-celibate gay clergy). After exploration of other options and conversations with Steel City Table leadership, we chose to move forward with this partnership, viewing it as an opportunity to not only provide meals to the hungry but also model a more inclusive theology. Meal preparation is led by Sharon Manley, with assistance from other Sixth members. Between August and December 2025, Sharon’s team provided 8 meals, serving approximately 100 individuals per meal. \$1800 was provided to support this mission in 2025.

Care pack distribution resumed in November 2025. Peter Watt-Morse led the effort to develop a new collaboration with Wilkinsburg Community Ministry and revamped the care packs to fit the needs of the population they serve. In 2025, we provided 100 care packs at a total cost of \$499.

Financial Support for Related Missions

The suspension of meals and distribution of care packs for part of 2025 resulted in surplus funds in the Deacons’ account. We chose to allot \$2400 to the Lazarus fund and contribute additional funds to local organizations providing direct services, specifically Rainbow Kitchen (\$1000), Wilkinsburg Community Ministry (\$1000), Jubilee Soup Kitchen (\$500), East End Cooperative Ministries (\$500), Community Kitchen PGH (\$225), and the Greater Pittsburgh Food Bank (\$225).

2026 Plans

In 2026, we are looking forward to resuming regular provision of meals for the hungry and distributions of care packs and expanding the number of Sixth members helping to distribute Lazarus funds. The Deacons are also developing plans for name tags to wear during church to help people (including our new pastor) learn and remember names. We hope that knowing others by name and being known by name will build an even stronger church community.

EARTH CARE

Our major project for this year was starting a pollinator garden in front of the church. The intention was to give ideas to people in the congregation to incorporate some of the plants into their own gardens.

We kicked off our project on Earth Day with a reception after church that included foods that are grown with pollinators and a workshop to make ‘BUG HOTELS’ where bugs can have a place to overwinter and rest.

The plants were chosen by Leslie Kaplan and planted where they could be seen outside the Murray Ave door. Weeding was done by members of the committee.

Every month we had an article in the newsletter on a variety of topics dealing with Earth Care.

We also continued to collect plastics for Michael's recycling about every other month.

Pam Howe

FELLOWSHIP

The handover of Jan Myers-Newbury's co-leadership to Lori King seems to have gone well.

Most pre-covid type functions are back and running for the most part.

We have had a busy year, with us facilitating the following:

- the Rev Christy experience (Gaza visit info session), 29 Sept 2024, we provided a light lunch
- Xmas dinner, prepped for 100-120 people, however the actual was more like 85-90
- Xmas Eve cookies and punch
- Ash Wednesday, incorporating Pancake Tuesday meal
- Maundy Thursday light meal
- Easter Sunday coffee hour with Devilled Eggs
- Confirmation and Dedication service reception, 11 May 25
- Sarah RR farewell reception, 18 May 25
- Church Picnic, 1 June 25
- Memorial Service receptions:
 - Cy Fox
 - Margaret Miller
 - Mary Lib Myers
- we also hosted a baptism reception
- we co-hosted Christian Education kickoff reception
- Revd Charissa installation reception

We enjoyed a good working relationship with Rev Sarah, and continue to do so with Rev Charissa, Kelly and Harry.

GUN SAFETY

Members: Lori Swenson, Lori King, Judy Schryer, Martha Funderburgh, Julie Caryl, Rae Hodges, Jin Shin, and visiting from Church of the Redeemer, Marianne Novy

Focus: Our general focus is on contacting elected officials, especially at the state level, to pass gun safety legislation and increase funding for violence prevention programs. Last year, we also focused on firearm suicide prevention. We plan to determine another topic on which to focus in 2026 at our next meeting.

Actions in 2025:

- March 23 presentation by Dr. Jay Breneman of CeaseFirePA about the role of guns in suicides and suicide prevention. It was a well-attended presentation, given the topic.

- June 28 Squirrel Hill Night Market at the corner of Forbes and Murray. We provided information, free gun locks, and a QR code to contact PA legislators about firearm legislation. We continue to plan to attend 1 Night Market a year.
- September 4 Gun Safety Rally at Sixth Church. This rally included members of the committee, local students and parents, and members of CeaseFirePA, Moms Demand Action, the Black Empowerment Project, and Indivisible Pittsburgh in response to the Annunciation Catholic School shooting in Minneapolis, MN.
- Members attended John Hopkins University and CeaseFirePA webinars on domestic violence, preventing gun suicides, and safe storage.
- November 16 Minute for Mission. Presented a Minute for Mission for the committee, focusing on domestic violence, school safety, and suicide prevention and invited members of the congregation to join the committee.

Next Meeting: February 15, 2026, after service

Submitted by Lori Swensson

HOUSE

This is a summary of the major projects addressed by the House Committee in 2025.

Winter:

Snow removal costs for the winter of 2024-2025 were very high. We are in the difficult position of having a lot of street frontage/ public sidewalks to clear. A few years ago we decided to chain off the front steps after snowstorms to reduce salt damage to the stone and concrete, and also labor costs. It is VERY difficult to find affordable snow removal that is also responsive to our needs. We tried a commercial company for the first time and found that their service was not very good or timely, and very expensive (it was also a very snowy winter). For the 2025-26 Winter season, we have hired our custodian, Harry Kirk to do the snow removal and salting. He notices when it needs to be done and has kept all the sidewalks and entrances clear in a timely manner.

Garden:

At the request of the Earth Care Committee, in the Spring I designed and planted a pollinator garden with the help of Chris Berg and Frank Guyette. This garden is located between the ramp sidewalk and Murray Ave/driveway on property formerly landscaped by the Condo. We agreed that if they removed the dying shrubs, we would relandscape the area. We planted a wide variety of native perennials backed by many native shrubs. Everything survived a very hot and dry summer. Many thanks to the Earth Care Committee for regular weeding and watering!

Other Projects:

Ice: In the past, heavy snow and ice have led to problems with the gutters, roof, and interior surfaces. Over the Summer Sembower-Mikesell came out and checked all of our downspouts for blockages. We used to have electric gutter cables over the Murray Avenue and driveway entrances to keep the melting ice water flowing down the drainpipes. These stopped working years ago. To reduce future repair expenses, we hired Nickolas Electric to replace the gutter and downspout wires. The project was completed in November.

Front Storm Doors:

The storm doors on the front (Murray Ave) of the church were hard to open and close. Boulevard Glass was hired to replace the closers and the hinges and to lubricate the locks. The work was completed in early fall.

Sanctuary furnace problems:

The heating system for our sanctuary has two furnaces and two hot air blowers. One of the blowers shorted out and blew a fuse. After several visits from Restano Plumbing, it was discovered that only one of the two blowers serviced the sanctuary. The other only served two rooms that also had radiators (an independent hot water system that serves the rest of the church building). They moved the working motor to the sanctuary blower and we had some heat, but not enough. They ordered us a new more powerful motor and installed it mid-January 2026, and corrected the direction of the rotation (thank you, Greg Winner for discovering this issue). Despite low temperature on the next Sunday (Jan 18), the Sanctuary was comfortably warm!

I would like to especially thank the volunteer church closers who take responsibility for closing windows, locking doors and turning off the lights each Sunday: Tom Cummings, Joan Markert, Jan Myers-Newbury, Greg Winner, Brenda Jordan, Mary Radcliffe, Ray Dittner, and Lynn Kawaratani. We are always in need of more volunteers!

Leslie Kaplan, Chair

PEACE AND JUSTICE WORKING GROUP

After a few years' hiatus, the Peace and Justice working group kicked into gear once again over the summer of 2025. With a goal to respond to growing concerns around the world and our own communities regarding injustice, genocide, oppression, and civil unrest, the group started out with planning responses to the atrocities in Gaza and increasing anti-immigrant actions in our own country.

Ongoing and growing concerns about the situation in Gaza and our country's lack of response to the humanitarian crisis weighed heavily on many. The working group started out by bringing an overture to the Session entitled "Recognition that Israel has Violated the International Law Prohibiting Genocide." This overture was initially passed by the Presbytery of the Redwoods, endorsed by our Session and is being considered by other Presbyteries around the country as a concurrence. With the support of multiple Presbyteries, the overture will be brought to the 2026 General Assembly of the PCUSA. Additionally, the working group planned and hosted an event with speaker Jonathan Kuttab, a human rights attorney in Israel and Palestine. The event benefited Friends of Sabeel North America (FOSNA) and The Palestine Children's Relief Fund. Although the death rate in Gaza has slowed since the 'peace agreement' was concluded, the situation remains dire. Over 470 Palestinians have been killed since October in the ongoing Israeli attacks on Gaza; children are currently dying of hypothermia and malnutrition; and Israel has recently announced a ban on 37 international humanitarian NGOs while continuing to ban UNRW (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees).

Closer to home, the working group focused on the increased persecution of immigrants in our country and the impact it is having in the Pittsburgh Area. The group chose to collaborate with Casa San

José, one of the organizations our church supports through the Church & Community Committee's annual allocations. In August, about 20 members and friends of Sixth joined over 300 Pittsburgh residents in a gathering sponsored by Casa San José at East Liberty Presbyterian Church, to learn about ways to address these issues. Several members of Sixth have joined Casa's Rapid Response team, which responds as a community when there is an ICE raid in the area. The team serves as legal witness to the event and provides support for the detainees and their families. As I write this report, we have learned of yet another murder by ICE agents in Minnesota. As of the end of October, there had been 948 arrests of mostly Latino immigrants in the Pittsburgh area. This number has continued to grow on a daily basis, but there is no current data available. As we see anti-immigrant actions and deaths at the hands of ICE agents increase across the country and closer to home, this work will continue to be an area of focus for this working group.

The Church and Community Committee allocated \$1,887.50 for this working group to spend. The group used \$100 to pay last year's speaker about the situation in Gaza, donated \$893.75 to Casa San José, and used the remaining \$890.76 for hosting Jonathan Kuttab, paying him an honorarium, and donating to a relief organization helping the people of Gaza.

Looking at 2026, the working group will focus on forming stronger collaborations across denominations with groups such as PIIN (Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network). We will discuss rejoining PIIN at our next meeting on Sunday, February 8 and have invited two PIIN Board members to attend our meeting. If we agree that Sixth Church should consider rejoining PIIN, we can present this recommendation to Session. We can also ask PIIN's Executive Director to make a presentation on the work PIIN is doing, how they are addressing issues of past concern, and learn about how collaboration could strengthen our own efforts.

In the meantime, the Peace and Justice working group will continue to respond to issues around our world, around our country, and around our community with compassion and action.

If you are interested in learning more about this working group, or are interested in joining this work, please reach out to Sara Berg or Tom Twiss.

PERSONNEL

The Personnel Committee of Sixth Presbyterian Church is responsible for ensuring that policies and procedures are in place for staff and volunteers are compliant with local, state, and federal labor laws, and in accordance with guidance provided by the Pittsburgh Presbytery. Throughout the year the Committee meets with Staff as needed to conduct business related to benefits, compensation, schedules, workloads, opportunities for growth, challenges, or emerging needs.

Personnel Committee Members:

Sara DeLucia (chair), Patty Halverson, Mary Lang, and Andrew Swensen

Staff of Sixth Presbyterian Church:

Rev. Dr. Charissa Clark Howe, Pastor and Head of Staff

Jenny Newman, Director of Christian Education

Shay Carter McGraw, Director of Music

Kelly Johnson, Office Administrator

Harry Kirk, Custodian

It is remarkable to say we experienced staff stability with only the change in pastor. Most churches would consider that too much at once! That is a true testament to the qualified people who faithfully work at our church. We celebrated the one year anniversaries of Office Administrator, Kelly Johnson, and Director of Music, Shay Carter McGraw. Our custodian, Harry Kirk, celebrated ten years of service. Jenny Newman has joyfully shared the institutional knowledge of working at Sixth, and has gone above and beyond expectations by providing a sense of stability to the church and staff while we experienced all the staff changeover.

We are thankful to now be in an era of consistent people who call working at Sixth their job. We welcomed the Reverend Doctor Charissa Clark Howe on May 18, 2025 as full time pastor and head of staff. Many thanks are offered for the work of the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC). With that addition, we said good-bye to our Interim Pastor, Reverend Sarah Robbins. We are grateful for the leadership and guidance Rev. Robbins gave to our staff during what seemed like a season of perpetual transitions!

*Respectfully submitted,
Sara DeLucia, Personnel Committee Chair*

STEWARDSHIP

The role of the Stewardship Committee is to raise the funds we at Sixth Presbyterian Church need to worship and learn about God, to maintain our beautiful building, and to pursue God's vision of an inclusive, just, peaceful, and livable world.

I cannot begin this report without a huge thank you to Peter Kaplan who was the Stewardship Committee Chairperson the past three years. He did a wonderful job leading the Committee. He stepped down in October, I stepped in as Interim, and Peg Watt-Morse will be serving as Stewardship Committee Chairperson moving forward.

Our year in review:

The Committee gathered at the end of May to discuss the possible Stewardship Campaign themes. We also put together our timeline for the Stewardship Campaign.

Peter wrote an article for the July Sixth Sense reminding congregants of why Sixth needs Stewardship.

Throughout June and July, the Stewardship Committee along with Rev. Dr. Howe met to finalize the Stewardship Campaign theme *Caring for One Another in a Changing World*. We also recruited 3 Moment for Stewardship speakers, and 7 Stewardship Testimonial writers.

The Stewardship Campaign theme and our reasons for that theme were published throughout August in the Sunday bulletins. Session also approved the theme and timeline.

Peter started work on the Stewardship Campaign letter with input from the Committee.

In September, the current and future Chairs of Stewardship, Finance, House, Personnel along with the Treasurer and Rev. Dr. Howe met to discuss the Stewardship Campaign Goal. Later in September, the Session approved the Stewardship Campaign Goal of \$373,635 with an ask of 3.5% over last year's pledge amount. The written Stewardship testimonials along with pictures of the writers were

submitted to Kelly Johnson. The Stewardship Campaign letter was also finalized.

October the Stewardship Campaign began. The Stewardship Campaign brochure was created and mailed to 109 households. We also had our first Moment for Stewardship and a sermon on Stewardship.

The November Sixth Sense contained all 7 written Stewardship Testimonials. November 9th was Dedication Sunday - Rev. Dr. Howe preached on Stewardship, we had another Moment for Stewardship and the Stewardship Committee hosted Coffee Hour.

Later in November Session members choose calling assignments to those whose pledges had not been received yet and we had our third Moment for Stewardship. The Stewardship Committee continued to make Stewardship Pledge calls until the end of the year.

As mentioned in the January Sixth Sense: We received 75 pledges worth \$350,513.50 which is 93.81% of our Stewardship Goal. While we lost 11 pledging units, we gained one new pledging unit and three returning pledging units.

Another HUGE thank you to all of our testimonial writers and speakers: Sue Koehler, Alice Scales, Sara Spinella, Julie Caryl & Rae Hodge, Martha Funderburgh, Kate Kennedy, Chris Berg, Kathi Robinson-Dassel and Andrew Swensen. They all did a phenomenal job!!

We owe additional thanks to the Session members who called many Church members who had not yet pledged by late November. Their help made the final weeks of the Campaign more manageable for the Stewardship Committee.

A special thank you to Kelly Johnson for all her work on the brochure and the pledge collection and tracking.

I end with another thank you to Peter Kaplan and the rest of our committee Barb Parees, Patty Halverson and our incoming Stewardship Chair Peg Watt-Morse.

*Gratefully submitted,
Beth Hazlett (Interim Stewardship Chair)*

WORSHIP

The past year has been an eventful one. We started with the Epiphany service. At the end of February, we met to plan for Lent and Easter. Some considerations included taking down the paraments and other hangings which Jan would take care of. We noted that "Alleluias" would not be part of any service during Lent. Sarah had plenty of ashes for Ash Wednesday. The Pascal candle would be carried into the sanctuary by a teen, probably one of the confirmation students. Jenny would order the palms for Palm Sunday. We would decorate the church for Easter after the Palm Sunday service. Maundy Thursday would be celebrated with a dinner in the chapel including communion and the choir would sing. The Easter service would include trumpets, communion, the young people singing, the choir processing.

During this time, we also were concerned with the donation of a new-to-us grand piano given by Jane Fox. Larry Allen was able to find a home for our previous piano at the church where he had been choral director and organist in the South Hills. The delivery of both pianos to their new homes was able to be accomplished in the same day.

May brought us Sarah's last Sunday May 18 with a fellowship following the service. Charissa started her call on May 25. Her first few services were not exactly normal. The second one June 1 was our annual Picnic in the Park with communion. Kirk was asked to provide the music for that service. The committee provided a table for communion and pitcher and chalices for the elements. The June 8 service was Pentecost with its celebrations including the red paraments and communion table runner. An explanation of the meaning of Pentecost was put into the newsletter and the bulletin. Shay was not able to be at that service because she was getting married the day before. Again, Kirk was asked to fill in. Fortunately, Charissa then had several weeks off due to plans made prior to her being called. Worship committee members hosted the replacement pastors on those Sundays.

In August, Pam H. and Joan cleaned out the closet at the top of the stairs and the one in the organ room which had accumulated a number of extraneous items. There are a number of previously used bibles and hymnals in the library that we would like to find a new home for but haven't succeeded in doing so as yet. Also about this time Pam Twiss expressed an interest in joining our committee, which we welcomed gladly. During a meeting in August we divided up the various recurring responsibilities of the committee including distribution of hymnals and bibles in the pews, also making certain that there were Kleenex, church information, collection envelops and a copy of the benediction song, checking on the votive candles on the altar, putting out bulletins for the ushers, putting some water in the baptismal font (and emptying it after the service) and cleaning the hearing ear-pieces. When we have communion we are also responsible for providing the elements and necessary servers.

The fall was relatively quiet with only Charissa's installation as an added service for which we provided the communion elements. World Communion Sunday on Oct. 5 needed an assortment of speakers of other languages to invite the congregation to the communion table. We were able to provide a number from the congregation.

Christmas preparations were planned to start with decorations going up after church on Dec 7. However we ended up doing them on the 8th. Leslie provided swags, wreaths and arrangements for the ends of the pews. She and Peter also helped with the decorating. Jan got the hangings and paraments up. Leslie found out from her supplier the cost of the poinsettias and put a flier into the bulletin for the congregation to order. We put up the tree after the church service on the 23rd.