

EC LEADER

A publication of the Evangelical Congregational Church



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FROM THE DESK

Bishop Randy Sizemore

Thanking God for His Church

"But it's not the building, it's the people of God who altogether become the very dwelling of God on this planet."

Click [HERE](#) for the Bishop's November video message



Speaking Schedule for 2024

Bishop Randy is now scheduling his 2024 preaching schedule.

If you would like to schedule him at your church, please contact Bishop Randy directly at rsizemore@eccenter.com.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR NEWS KEVIN HENRY



EC Benefits Update

The 2024 Social Security COLA adjustment was released at 3.2%. The Pastoral Compensation Committee recommends pastors receive the annual Social Security COLA increase as approved at the May 2023 national conference. Health insurances rates will be increasing 15% on January 1, 2024. The active pastor's health insurance plan with Guidestone has not increased rates the previous two years. Pension contribution will increase next year at the normal amounts, \$20/month to \$380/month for full-time pastors and \$10/month to \$190/month for part-time pastors.

The Guidestone plan is changing from a \$1,000 single and \$2,000 family deductible to a \$2,000 single and \$4,000 family deductible plan, however, the HRA benefits will remain the same. The HRA benefit annual maximum out-of-pocket for covered medical expenses, excluding co-pays, remains at \$500 with the HRA paying costs above \$500. The maximum out of pocket for prescriptions and outpatient therapy services (physical therapy,

occupational therapy, speech therapy, respiratory therapy and manipulative therapy) also remains at \$1,800 annually. Participants in the active pastor's health insurance plan will be receiving new ID cards for 2024.

Health Insurance Rates (per month)

	<u>2023</u>	<u>2024</u>
Single Coverage	\$ 870	\$1,000
Couple Coverage	\$1,844	\$2,121
Family Coverage	\$2,297	\$2,642
Employee & Child(ren)	\$1,741	\$2,002



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR NEWS KEVIN HENRY

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EC Benefits Update *continued...*

If you have incurred medical expenses above \$500 or prescription or outpatient therapy costs above \$1,800, you may be eligible for reimbursement of your out-of-pocket costs from the HRA. The HRA plan year ends on December 31, 2023, and all requests for reimbursement for the January 2023 - December 2023 plan year must be received by Benecon, our HRA administrator, by March 31, 2024 (ninety days after the end of the plan year). If you need assistance with Benecon, please contact me at the EC Church Center, and I will walk you through the process.

Highmark Freedom Blue

The retiree Medicare supplemental plan, Highmark Freedom Blue, is not increasing for 2024. The premium will remain \$255 per person per month, effective January 1, 2024, with no changes in coverage levels.

For a husband and wife on Freedom Blue, double the above amounts.

The open enrollment period for the Highmark Freedom Blue plan is from October 15, 2023, through December 7, 2023. Retirees enrolled in another Medicare supplemental plan or not in a Medicare supplemental plan may join the Freedom Blue plan only during the open enrollment period. The open enrollment period does not affect pastors that plan on retiring after December 7, 2023. Medicare eligible pastors may join Freedom Blue at the time they superannuate or retire from pastoral service.

It is very important that the retiree does not fall behind on payments to Highmark Freedom Blue. If a retiree is having difficulty paying the monthly premium, the Manna Fund is available for financial assistance. Please contact Kevin Henry (khenry@eccenter.com) or Bethany White (bwhite@eccenter.com) in the EC Benefits office for a Manna Fund application.

There are many Medicare Advantage plans available, even some at no cost to the participant. However, each plan will have positives and negatives in terms of participating providers and benefits provided. Please thoroughly investigate a Medicare Advantage plan before switching plans. If a retiree does not have the financial means to assume a larger portion of the Freedom Blue plan, the Manna Fund is available to financially assist the retiree.

Manna Fund

The Manna Fund was established to assist our retired clergy and surviving spouses with financial needs. The income limits to qualify for a Manna Fund distribution were recently changed to 200% of the federal poverty level as defined by the US Department of Health and Human Services; the 2023 Manna Fund income limits are \$29,160 for a single and \$39,440 for a couple. If you are aware of any of our retired clergy or surviving spouses that could benefit from a Manna Fund distribution, please encourage them to complete an application for assistance. Manna Fund applications were mailed to retired clergy and surviving spouses in October and an application may also be requested from the EC Church Center.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR NEWS KEVIN HENRY

continued...



EC Benefits Update *continued...*

We are quickly approaching the end of the calendar year, and we are encouraging all the local church pastors, treasurers or administrators to begin planning for the required year-end reporting. Required reporting includes year-end tax forms, giving statements, denomination annual reports and pastoral compensation forms. A small amount of preparation and planning early in the process will save time and frustration later. Due dates for year-end reporting:

Due to EC Church Center - forms may be email to office@eccenter.com:

Pastor Salary Forms	January 16, 2024
Annual Reports	January 25, 2024

Please note the earlier filing deadlines of W-2s and 1099 – NEC/MISC forms:
Form W-2 (pastors and church employees) January 31, 2024
Filed with Social Security - January 31, 2024 (paper and electronic forms)

Form 1099-NEC/MISC (independent contractors) January 31, 2024
Filed with IRS - January 31, 2024 (paper and electronic forms)

Pastors are employees of the local church and should receive a W-2 with federal, state and local taxes withheld from every paycheck.

Please contact Kevin Henry or Bethany White at the EC Church Center with any questions.

Kevin Henry
Executive Director
khenry@eccenter.com or 717-628-2171.



PASTORAL CHANGES

January 1, 2024 is the deadline for both churches and pastors to submit written requests for a change or superannuation (retirement) to the Bishop.

GMC

Global Ministries Community of the Evangelical Congregational Church



You came alongside...

I'm glad in God, far happier than you would ever guess—happy that you're again showing such strong concern for me. Not that you ever quit praying and thinking about me. You just had no chance to show it.

*Actually, I don't have a sense of needing anything personally. I've learned by now to be quite content whatever my circumstances. I'm just as happy with little as with much, with much as with little. I've found the recipe for being happy whether full or hungry, hands full or hands empty. Whatever I have, wherever I am, I can make it through anything in the One who makes me who I am. I don't mean that your help didn't mean a lot to me—it did. **It was a beautiful thing that you came alongside me in my troubles [burdens].***

Philippians 4:10-20 (MSG)

I have shared a message in multiple churches now regarding how, we believe, Scripture tells us to “share in the burden” of advancing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The EC Church USA has had a long history in sharing in this burden as we continue our partnership with many churches across the world. It is in our DNA to be engaged in God’s global movement. Your generosity in support - being prayer and financial - is “sharing in the burden” of our brothers and sisters who seek to faithfully, boldly and sacrificially take the Gospel to their communities.

It is our privilege as the GMC to represent our missionaries and international churches before you and provide avenues for our local churches to live in obedience to Christ’s command to bear witness to Him to the ends of the earth. Thank you for “sharing” in this burden *alongside us; alongside* the missionaries you support and *alongside* your international brothers and sisters. On a wide scale, we do this as a denomination, and as we do it together, it creates more momentum and synergy than if we were acting as individuals or sole churches. As we unify around the mission God has given us, our prayer is that we will see an even greater dynamic movement begin and more people come to faith in Christ.

Ted Rathman



To know how your church can partner directly with an EC missionary or an International EC Church, call the GMC office at 717-866-7581 x 1109; or email ecglobal@eccenter.com.



Connect with us on Facebook:
[@GMC.ECChurch](https://www.facebook.com/GMC.ECChurch)





God Uses a Gift and a Letter to Change Lives

As a 7-year-old in Mongolia, Jargalmaa (pictured left) described one particular day as “unexpected.” After school, her teacher invited her to a church where she received her very first gift! This Operation Christmas Child shoebox gift included, among other fun toys, stationery, and a set of hairclips. Inside, she also found a letter that said, “You are valuable and so loved by God.” Jargalmaa cherished this message because her parents and grandparents had never told her that they loved her.

Jargalmaa went on to participate in The Greatest Journey discipleship program where she especially appreciated the lessons about God as Creator. Later in 10th grade, she accepted Jesus as her Lord and Savior. Through her testimony, five of her family members and two close friends also made this life-changing decision.

Now 15 years after receiving her shoebox gift, Jargalmaa, her husband, and two young children have recently moved to a new community where they are ministering to youth in hopes of starting a church.

“I would like to challenge people who are preparing shoebox gifts to also write a letter showing God’s love,” Jargalmaa said. **“What’s written there may be very simple, but those simple words could completely change somebody’s life.”**



Need more information
about what to put in a
shoebox?
[Click here!](#)

**National Collection Week is
November 13-20**



Kingdom Extension Community News

FROM THE DESK

Rev. Mike Snedeker, KEC Associate

Believing In Prayer

Last month I told you we were going to be meeting our EC Church planters. We will continue to introduce you to them, but I wanted to pause to encourage you to pray. I believe God wants to make the EC Church a dynamic movement of God as Bishop Randy has been faithfully reminding us, but as he shared at the recent NMT meeting, that movement must be birthed in prayer.

Allow me to share a short story with you. In January of 2023, my congregation began looking for a children's ministry director. We did all the things you should do in the process. We updated the job description. We sent out notices to the EC Church family. We advertised to local colleges and universities. We even sent messages to other local churches to see if they had individuals who would be interested. Then we waited... and waited some more. We made excuses for the difficulty of hiring for such a specific part-time position. Still, after months of waiting, we had not found the right candidate for the job.

At a leadership team meeting in September, we felt God's conviction that we needed to pray fervently and boldly for God to provide.

Don't get me wrong, we had prayed for Him to provide: it was part of Sunday morning prayers; it was part of prayer lists we had sent out; but in this meeting, we felt God was asking us to pray boldly. One individual prayed that God would supply this person within a week. We trusted God, and within a week, we had three individuals who reached out to apply for the job. Two were very qualified and even then, God moved in one of these individuals to withdraw her application, and He made it clear who we should hire!

Why do I share this with you? I am not suggesting that when we pray "the right way," God will give us whatever we want. God is not a cosmic gumball machine or supernatural Santa. But He invites us to boldly come before His throne in prayer (Heb. 4:16). In this boldness, we are seeking God's grace and provision and trusting in His perfect plans. James tells us we have not because we ask not (James 4:2). When our motives are aligned with God's heart, He invites us to boldly ask, and He will provide according to his will.

Would you consider adopting one or two of our church planters as a prayer partner? Would you begin to seek God's heart for them in prayer? Would you pray fervently and boldly for them? Would you take a day a month and fast on their behalf (giving up something good to seek after something great)?

Kingdom Extension Community News

FROM THE DESK

Rev. Mike Snedeker, KEC Associate
continued...

Believing In Prayer

continued...

Every month I include some prayer items for our EC Church planters. Please join me in praying for them... fervently, boldly, seeking God's direction and provision for the ministry He has called them to. If you would like to connect directly with one of our church planters, reach out to me (msnedeker@eccenter.com), and I would be glad to connect you with them so that you can work together seeking God's direction for their lives and ministry.



Please continue to pray this month for the following new church planting opportunities that God is raising up:

Mike Coulson and People's EC Church in the Virtual Space – Echo, the name of this church that is meeting in the Virtual Space, is reaching people with the Gospel and making disciples. Pray that the team will continue to develop and grow.

Manuel and Luz Arias in Lexington, South Carolina – The Arias family is starting a new EC Church. Manuel and Luz are developing a team for ministry, as well as strategizing ways to share the Gospel in tangible ways. Please pray that God would provide a location for this church to use for worship gatherings. Pray also for wisdom, strength and renewed energy for this couple.

Haitian Church Plant – Chezaire and Laurel Dominique have begun meeting with a leadership team to pray and seek God's vision for a Haitian church. Please pray as God continues to gather the planting team that He gives them a specific vision for the future and energizes them for this task. They are also looking for a location to begin public worship gatherings and to serve as a base for making disciples.

The Reams – Tim and Pam Ream have moved to Thorn Hill, Tennessee. They are pursuing the opportunity to engage in planting an EC Church in their new community. Pray that God would begin preparing that community to be receptive to His glorious presence. Pray also for the Reams as they begin building relationships and engaging in discipleship relationships through inviting people into their homes and engaging individuals in their community.

Zach and Kelsey Van Dyke – Zach and Kelsey have begun planting a network of house churches in and around Davenport, Iowa. They are currently meeting weekly with a group in their own home and seeking God's plan for their future. They are developing a vision for raising up house church shepherds and developing a discipleship and multiplication strategy. Please pray for Zach and Kelsey that God would give them wisdom as they follow Him while providing part-time shepherding to the Hooppole, Illinois, EC Church.

New Church Planters – We have three other individuals / couples that are exploring their potential call to become church planters with the EC Church. Please pray for clear vision for these couples. Also pray for courage as they consider taking a difficult step in an uncertain ministry realm.

Greater Impact – Please pray for churches across our denomination as they look to expand and even multiply their impact on their communities. Pray for wisdom for our pastors and leaders. Pray for eyes to see the needs of their communities, and pray for creativity as they step into the opportunities to meet those needs with the love of Christ.

Ministerial Development Community News

FROM THE DESK

Rev. Matt Hill, MDC Associate



We Give Thanks

We at the Ministerial Development Community have much to give thanks for this November. While change is a natural part of life, we have experienced multiple changes in the MDC, but in all the change God has faithfully supplied our needs. As we come close to the end of 2023, we give thanks for the continued work of the Ministerial Development Community and the fresh vision God has placed in the hearts of our new leadership team.

One new addition we celebrate is the addition of the Chaplaincy Committee to the oversight of the MDC. In previous years, the Chaplaincy Committee was overseen by the GMC. Because of the Chaplaincy Committee's work in endorsing our military and Veterans Affairs chaplains, it was decided to bring the committee under the MDC. We are excited to have Rev. Dr. W. Joel Copeland as the chair of the committee. Joel is excited to revitalize the committee and bring light to the ministry of our chaplains, both military and civilian volunteers. To learn more about chaplaincy ministry or to register as a volunteer chaplain in our denomination, please contact Joel at ecparson@hotmail.com.

We also give thanks for Rev. Adam Roberts who has accepted the director position in the Institute for Church Leadership (ICL). Adam has previously served as one of our instructors for the EC History and Polity class and is excited to use his gifts to speak into the lives of our ICL students and to assist in casting new vision for helping the lay people of our churches connect with the ICL. To learn more about the ICL program and lifelong learning opportunities, contact Adam Roberts at aproberts563@gmail.com. And, we thank Rev. Dr. Joel Kime for sharing his time and talents as the previous director of the ICL.

Finally, we celebrate the addition of Rev. Dave Long as our new coaching associate. One of the many blessings in our credentialing pathway is the opportunity to be matched with a vocational coach. New pastoral candidates are supported through our coaching process as they navigate the joys and challenges of ministry. Dave is excited and ready to serve our new candidates and seasoned pastors who are looking for a coach. To learn more about coaching, contact Dave Long at pastdave@hotmail.com.

Matt



Ministerial Development Community News

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Institute for Church Leadership

The Institute for Church Leadership offers courses every fall and spring for anyone who would like to go deeper in their relationship with God, the study of His Word and service to His Kingdom. The schedule for the courses is listed below, and currently we are in the Fall 2 in this schedule.

Term	Formative Course	Informative Course
Fall 1	Intro to Ministry	Hermeneutics
Spring 1	Pastoral Leadership	OT Survey
Fall 2	Personal Spiritual Formation	NT Survey
Spring 2	Preaching	Theology 1
Fall 3	Healthy Worship & Ministry	Theology 2
Spring 3	Developing a Contextual Missional Mindset	Church History

The fall course currently open for enrollment is:

New Testament Survey, October 31 – December 12, 6:30-9:15 p.m.

Instructor: Tim Valentino

In this course the student will explore the central meaning and message of the New Testament, showing how Jesus fulfills Old Testament expectations. Attention will be given to the background, setting structure and major themes of the New Testament as a whole. The course will serve as a general introduction to this part of Scripture and provide a list of suggested resources for further study as the course unfolds.

About the Instructor: Tim Valentino has been a professor at Evangelical Seminary since 2007, teaching a variety of Bible, theology, pastoral ministry and student writing courses. He presently teaches in the Doctor of Theology and Master of Divinity programs at Kairos University. Tim received his M.Div. from Evangelical Seminary and his D.Min. from Southern Seminary in Louisville, KY. He is now finishing his Th.D. degree at Evangelical Seminary. Tim has served in pastoral ministry since 1992 and currently serves as Pastor of Christ Community Church in Myerstown, PA. Tim and his wife, Sonya, reside in Myerstown as well. They have two children and two grandchildren. He blogs at <https://timandsonya.net>.

The fee is \$50 to audit a course. Register online on the [MDC](#) page or send a check made payable to the EC Church (see the last page of this publication for the address); indicate the course the payment is for on the memo line. Registration is open up to the first week of class. Once payment is received, a Zoom link will be sent so that the auditor may participate in the sessions.

If enrolling in an ICL course through Kairos, do so through their Pathwright system: <https://kairos.pathwright.com>.

If you have questions or would like to speak with someone about the series of courses offered through the ICL, please complete the online form at <https://mdc.eccenter.com/icl-contact-form/>.

Twin Pines Update:



This year, your congregation has 4 weekends to choose from for Winter Thaw:

- Winter Thaw A: Jan. 12th-14th
- Winter Thaw B: Jan. 26th-28th
- Winter Thaw C: Feb. 16th-18th (opportunity to attend without a youth group)
- Winter Thaw D: Feb. 23rd-25th

Winter Thaw is the perfect opportunity for your church's youth group to attend an exciting and engaging Winter Retreat experience without all of the headaches that can come with retreat logistics and planning. That's why Winter Thaw exists at Twin Pines, we do the planning and you get to spend time with your students, and help them grow in their relationship with Jesus.

There are fewer barriers to entry than you think! All you need to do is bring your youth group and a few chaperones and we do the rest! Reach out to us and get your Youth Group signed up while there is still space! Pricing is cost-effective and is as low as \$130.00 per-person if registering early!

-Also-

Does your church have a few youth, but not enough for a full group? Consider sending them to Winter Thaw C where we provide all of the staffing and supervision; and they're free to make friends and grow deeper in their faith!

Email: Jonah@twinpines.org to sign up for Winter Thaw A-C or call the office for more information: 570-629-2411



CALENDAR

NOVEMBER 2023

Friday, November 3

Day of Prayer for the EC Church

Saturday, November 4

PAC Training

Sunday, November 5

Day of Prayer for Kingdom Extension Community

Daylight Savings Time Ends

Liturgical Color - Green

Tuesday, November 7

Election Day

Saturday, November 11

Veterans Day

Sunday, November 12

Liturgical Color - Green

Wednesday, November 15

Health Insurance Due

Friday and Saturday, November 17 - 18

EC Ethos Class

Sunday, November 19

Thanksgiving Sunday

Thankoffering (voluntary)

Liturgical Color - Green

Thursday, November 23

Thanksgiving

EC Center Closed

Friday, November 24

EC Center Closed

Sunday, November 26

Liturgical Color - Green

DECEMBER 2023

Friday, December 1

Day of Prayer for the EC Church

Sunday, December 3

Day of Prayer for Kingdom Extension Community

First Sunday of Advent

Liturgical Color - Purple

Sunday, December 10

Second Sunday of Advent

Liturgical Color - Purple

Friday, December 15

Health Insurance Due

Sunday, December 17

Third Sunday of Advent

Christmas Missions Offering

Liturgical Color - Purple

Friday, December 22

EC Center Closed

Sunday, December 24

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Christmas Eve

Liturgical Color - Purple

Monday, December 25

Christmas Day

EC Center Closed

Tuesday, December 26

EC Center Closed

Friday, December 29

EC Center Closed

Sunday, December 31

New Year's Eve Day

Liturgical Color - White



**Ministry Funds, Thankoffering,
Christmas Missions Offering
and Insurance & Benefits:**

Mail to:

**EC Church Center
100 W. Park Ave.
Myerstown, PA 17067**



A Dynamic Movement of God

The Evangelical Congregational Church will be a **dynamic movement** of God led by pastors and laity who have a **burning passion** for God and a missionary zeal to reach the lost. We will creatively obey the Great Commission by transforming plateaued and declining churches into healthy, disciple-making churches that are committed to evangelizing the communities to which God has called them. Healthy churches will reproduce themselves by planting churches in least-reached communities.

Evangelical Congregational Church Center
100 West Park Avenue, Myerstown, PA 17067
717-866-7581

office@eccenter.com / www.eccenter.com

Office Hours: Monday - Thursday
8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.



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November 2023 Edition - Editor/Art Design

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