

EC LEADER

A publication of the Evangelical Congregational Church

NOVEMBER 2026



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FROM THE DESK

Bishop Randy Sizemore

Navigating AI

“Because our God is sovereign... there is nothing, including artificial intelligence, that is greater or smarter or more in control than He.”


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

NAE's Resolution on AI



Speaking Schedule for 2027

Bishop Randy is now scheduling his 2027 preaching schedule.

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

As always, please email:

Bethany White
NC Administrative
Assistant / Business
Office and Benefits Corp
Specialist
bwhite@eccenter.com

Kevin Henry
Executive Director
khenny@eccenter.com

with any questions
 or call
717.866.7581

The 2027 Social Security COLA was released at 3.6%. The Pastoral Compensation Committee recommends pastors receive the annual Social Security COLA increase as approved at the May 2026 National Conference. Using the Social Security COLA for annual salary increases is a recommendation, not a mandate. As the date to approve the church's 2027 budget quickly approaches, churches are encouraged to decide on a salary increase and be generous with their pastor's salary. Pension contributions will increase next year at the normal amount: \$20/month to \$440/month for full-time pastors, and \$10/month to \$220/month for part-time pastors. The Disability premium and Benefit Corporation Service Fee will remain the same at \$100 and \$125, respectively, per pastor per year.

The EC Benefits Corporation trustees approved the offering of two health insurance plans for 2027: Health Choice 6000 with an HRA and Health Saver 6000 with an HSA. Each of these plans represents an increase in the plan deductible and out-of-pocket maximum for participants. The increase in the plan's participant cost is mitigated somewhat by the HRA

funding and increased employer funding in HSA accounts. The plan premiums increased by 9% from 2026.

Plan 1 - Health Choice 6000

Monthly Rates

	<u>2026</u>	<u>2027</u>
Single	\$1,562	\$1,703
Couple	\$3,314	\$3,464
Family	\$4,129	\$4,501
Employee & Child(ren)	\$3,129	\$3,411

Plan 2 - Health Saver 6000

Monthly Rates

	<u>2026</u>	<u>2027</u>
Single	\$1,418	\$1,546
Couple	\$2,660	\$2,899
Family	\$3,676	\$4,007
Employee & Child(ren)	\$2,435	\$2,654

Highmark Freedom Blue

The retiree Medicare supplemental plan, Highmark Freedom Blue, premium is increasing for 2027 by \$6 per person per month to \$311/month, effective January 1, 2027, with minimal changes in coverage levels. For a husband and wife on Freedom Blue, double the amounts above.

The open enrollment period for the Highmark Freedom Blue plan is from October 15, 2026 through December 7, 2026. 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, 2026. Medicare-eligible pastors may join Freedom Blue at the time they superannuate or retire from pastoral service.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR NEWS

KEVIN HENRY

continued...

As always, please email:

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with any questions
or call
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Recent news reports have discussed contract negotiations between Lehigh Valley Health Network (LVHN) and Highmark Blue Shield. It is not yet clear whether LVHN will be in-network for Highmark Senior Blue plans. If you receive care from LVHN and currently have Highmark Senior Blue coverage, carefully review your Medicare Advantage options for 2027. Many plans are available, including some with no participant premium, but each differs in provider networks and benefits. Insurance brokers offer Medicare plan-selection counseling at no charge. Seek qualified guidance to choose the Medicare coverage that best meets your healthcare needs.

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 are 200% of the federal poverty level as defined by the US Department of Health and Human Services. The 2026 Manna Fund income limits are \$31,920 for a single individual and \$43,280 for a couple. If you are aware of any of our retired clergy or surviving spouses

who could benefit from a Manna Fund distribution, please encourage them to complete an application for assistance. Manna Fund applications are mailed to retired clergy and surviving spouses in April, and an application may also be requested from the Benefits Administrator at the EC Church Center.

We are quickly approaching the end of the calendar year, and we are encouraging all 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 emailed to office@eccenter.com

Pastoral Compensation Forms	December 31, 2026
Annual Reports	January 25, 2027

Please note the earlier filing deadlines of W-2s and 1099 – NEC/MISC forms:

Form W-2 (pastors and church employees)	February 1, 2027
Filed with Social Security - February 1, 2027 (paper and electronic forms)	
Form 1099-NEC/MISC (Independent contractors)	February 1, 2027
Filed with Social Security - February 1, 2027 (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

Bethany White
Benefits Corp Specialist

Church Health Community News

Are You Ready For Change?

continued...

Malphurs advises that leaders pick one issue with a low score and work on it. If communication is mostly one-way, start by listening. Have a few 1:1 conversations over coffee and ask people what they love about the church and what worries them. You are not announcing change; you are building the trust change requires. I have been meeting with each member of our ministry council monthly, one-on-one, for the past several years. Not only has this helped our relationships grow, but it has also made the group meetings more productive. We kick around ideas for each person's area of ministry, and I always close with two questions: "How can I help?" and "How can I pray for you?" Sometimes the most productive step is investing in one relationship. A respectful, patient conversation with an influential skeptic, one that begins with listening, can shift a whole room over time.

Look for small wins. The inventory asks whether your church has successfully changed in the recent past. If it has not, a modest, low-risk idea, like refreshing a ministry or adjusting a program that already struggles, creates the memory of change going well. A culture of change can be built as people come to expect that there will be some differences in the building and programs on a regular basis.

Honor the past. Long-standing traditions often reflect real faithfulness. Resistance frequently comes from people who fear losing something precious, not people who want to harm the church. In many cases, pastors describe fears that they will kill something that may already be dead. Honoring the past does not mean staying stuck there.

Some pastors are carrying real wounds from leaders who blocked, criticized or wore them down. Your discouragement is understandable. The inventory does not ask you to pretend otherwise. It asks you to be honest about where influence lies, including unofficial leaders like the church patriarch or matriarch, and to take them seriously rather than go around them.

Church revitalization usually is not a dramatic overnight turnaround. It tends to come from slow faithfulness: assessing honestly, strengthening what is weak, celebrating small progress and trusting God with the timing. We recommend reading *Advanced Strategic Planning*. Then, take the inventory (Appendix A) and invite a trusted member or two to score it with you. Your church may be more ready than you fear, or it may need significant preparation first. Either way, you will be leading with clarity instead of guesswork, and that is a step worth taking. The Church Health Community is here to help and to walk with you through the process. Feel free to reach out anytime at waynehouck@gmail.com if you have any questions. And remember, the Church Ministry Assessment is available free for the asking. Just let me know how we can help.



Global Ministries Community News

FROM THE DESK

Dee Jaramillo, GMC Deputy Director

Gratitude that Reaches to the Ends of the Earth

As we reflect on God's faithfulness, the Global Ministries Community is filled with gratitude for the remarkable generosity of our Evangelical Congregational churches. Through your faithful giving, prayers, encouragement and partnership, you continue to strengthen and sustain EC missionaries, international churches and ministry leaders who are faithfully sharing the Good News of Jesus around the world. Your generosity represents so much more than financial support; it is a beautiful expression of our shared commitment to God's Kingdom and a tangible reminder to those serving far from home that they are not serving alone. Together, we have the privilege of participating in what God is doing across cultures, communities and nations.

Yet our gratitude begins somewhere even deeper. Before we ever give, serve, send or go, we are recipients of God's extraordinary grace and mercy. Everything we offer flows from what He has already so generously given us through Jesus Christ. As the psalmist asks, "What can I offer the LORD for all he has done for me?" (Psalm 116:12, NLT). Our response of gratitude becomes an act of worship when we willingly place our resources, gifts, prayers and very lives into His hands. We do not give to earn God's favor or repay a debt we could never repay; we give because His love has transformed our hearts. Our generosity becomes a joyful declaration that everything we have belongs to Him and that His purposes are worthy of our very best.

And what an extraordinary purpose He has entrusted to us! In Acts 1:8, Jesus commissions His followers to be His witnesses "to the ends of the earth." The grace and mercy we have received were never intended to stop with us. We have been entrusted with the life-giving message of reconciliation through Jesus Christ, and we are called to carry it faithfully into a world that desperately needs Him. Whether we are praying, giving, encouraging, sending or personally going, we participate in that sacred calling together. As we continue partnering with our missionaries and international brothers and sisters, may our gratitude deepen our discipleship, enlarge our hearts for God's world and strengthen our resolve to make Jesus known.

May our thanksgiving become more than words of appreciation; may it become a ThankOffering of worship expressed through lives joyfully surrendered to His mission - to the ends of the earth and for the glory of God!

Dee



Global Ministries Community News

FROM THE DESK

Dee Jaramillo, GMC Deputy Director

End-of-Year Personal Missionary Gifts

The missionaries supported by the Global Ministries Community of the Evangelical Congregational Church are beyond blessed with the gifts that come from donors supporting their ministries throughout the year. With stores already decorating for Christmas, it is approaching the time when many of you may be considering making an end-of-year personal gift contribution to support our missionaries. As such, we would like to make you aware of a few items.

- If the missionary you would like to bless with a personal gift lives and serves in the United States, it is best to send the gift directly to them. If you need an address, please do not hesitate to reach out to our office, ecglobal@eccenter.com.
- The US Postal Service has had a change in their operations, and mail may not be transferred to a mail processing facility and, hence, may not be postmarked, the same day that it is put in the mail. Therefore, for mail to be considered received by December 31 by postmark, mail will need to be placed in the mail before December 31.
- Gift distributions from our office occur quarterly, so personal gifts that arrive after December 31 will not be sent to the missionary until April.

We thank you for your generosity and your support of the global reach of the Evangelical Congregational Church!



**Global
Ministries
Community**

**Resourcing and assisting the
local church in cultivating
mission-mindedness.**



Kingdom Extension Community News

Rev. Mike Snedeker, KEC Associate

“Excuse Me While I Single-Handedly Neutralize Al-Qaeda”

That is an odd name for an EC Leader article! I know. I agree. But stick with me. It is the title of a short essay written by Brant Hansen. You may know Brant from his syndicated Christian radio show that runs on multiple stations nationwide. Brant has a great sense of humor and a real gift for looking at things from a different perspective. Brant has autism, so yes, he does see the world differently.

In the essay, he lists ten steps to neutralize Al-Qaeda. The essay is too long to reproduce here, so I will summarize. You will quickly recognize that his point is the tactics are exactly the same as how the enemy might choose to neutralize, or at least slow to a crawl, the work of the church and the spread of the Kingdom. Some of the steps are:

1. Complexify the message - The message of the gospel is simple, but we have made it so complex many believers feel uncomfortable and ill-equipped to share it as part of their everyday lives.
2. Construct a less “flat,” more hierarchical, structure.
3. Foster “expert” culture and barriers to entry to the expert class - I think pastors are so important. But we have made the educational process and the expertise of pastors so significant in our churches that the average follower of Jesus does not believe they are able to be a missionary where they live, learn, work and play.
4. Focus on knowledge rather than doing - This one is HUGE! Brant writes, “Complexification and expert-class development will make cells spend immense amounts of time studying the work, even debating theories of the work, rather than doing it. Better yet ...”
5. Equate STUDYING the work with the work itself - We spend most of our time as churches, or maybe even all of our time, studying and learning, and we have forgotten the DOING of living out the gospel and expanding the Kingdom of God.
6. Sabotage cell multiplication.
7. Make operatives really, really busy.
8. Get Al-Qaeda to seek governmental approval.
9. Co-opt Al-Qaeda with the larger culture.
10. Convince members to wear Al-Qaeda t-shirts with funny sayings and stuff.

If you would like a pdf of the entire essay, let me know, and I would be happy to forward it! But here is the point: The enemy has effectively neutralized the mission of the church to make disciples of all nations by getting us to focus so much on ourselves. As church leaders, our job is not to do ministry, but to equip the church of JESUS and ALL of its members to live out the gospel and fulfill God's masterpiece mission that He has given to EACH and EVERY believer.

Mike



Kingdom Extension Community News

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

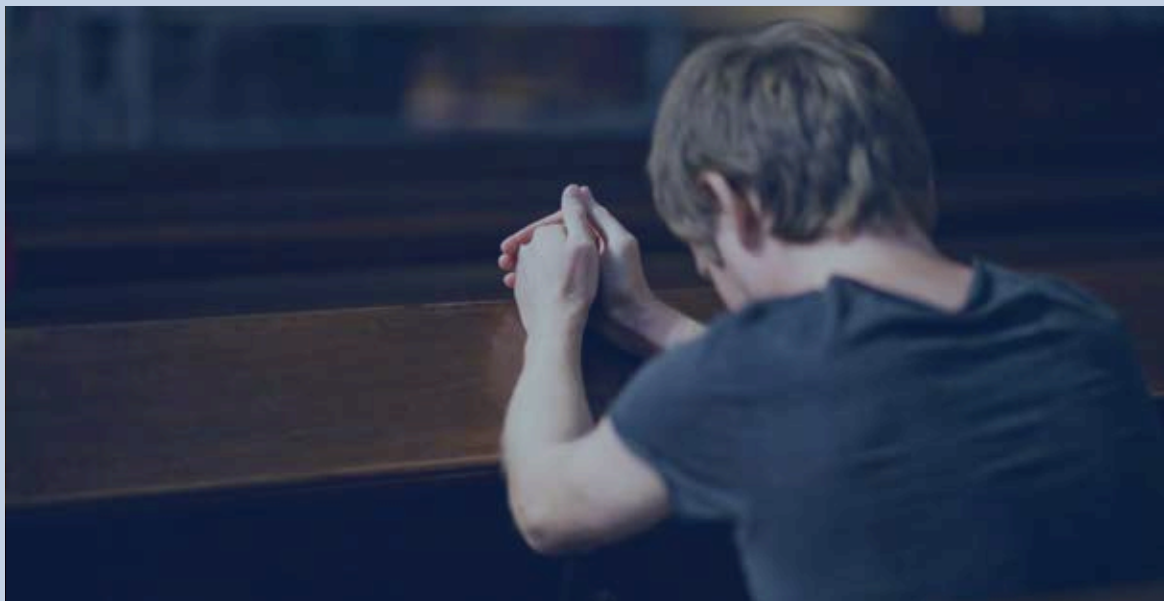
El Shaddai – The Dominiques and Martial Pierre are well into actively planting a Haitian church in Lancaster, PA. El Shaddai Community has been meeting on Sunday evenings for worship services at Trinity EC Church in Lancaster, PA. They are seeing new families every week and seeing people come to know Christ and follow Him. Please pray for our Haitian brothers and sisters at this time. Despite having legal status, there is much fear in the Haitian communities with the increasing deportation measures being taken. This has impacted church attendance and participation. Pray for peace in their hearts and the ability to keep their eyes on and hope in Jesus. Please pray especially for Martial and his family. His wife and children remain in Haiti and are seeking to gain asylum to the US.

Manuel and Luz Arias – Praise the Lord!!!! The Casa de Amor church plant held its first official church service, open to the public, on October 25, 2026. Next month we will highlight their launch service and what God is accomplishing in the first EC church in South Carolina! Pray for wisdom, strength and renewed energy for this couple. Manuel and Luz have especially asked for prayer for their family. Manuel has transitioned from full-time employment on top of church planting to part-time employment and part-time paid church-planting ministry.

Tim and Pam Ream – The Reams 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 home and engaging individuals in their community.

Mike Coulson and People's EC Church – 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. People's is also beginning a micro church that will meet at Confessions Bar in Nesquehoning. Pray for this open door to be a gospel-presence where people who need Jesus hang out!

New Opportunities – Please pray that God would call new church planters and church-planting couples. The fields are ripe to the harvest. We would love to partner with many more to see new EC churches planted for the sake of the Kingdom and for the glory of God!



Ministerial Development Community News

CHAPLAINCY CORNER

Rev. W. Joel Copeland, Jr., Chaplaincy Committee Chair

We want to welcome Rev. Bryan Dever to the ranks of the chaplaincy this month. Bryan has been one of our EC pastors since starting as an assistant in Annville in 1981, and retiring this past National Conference from Annville as pastor after serving several appointments elsewhere between these two appointments. This September, he started a residential CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education) program at the Lebanon VA Medical Center. When asked to supply a short article on what CPE meant to him and how it helped him, he furnished the following article.

You Want Me To Do WHAT?!

The best laid plans of mice and men (and pastors!) often go awry...

After forty-plus years in pastoral ministry, I assumed that I would officially announce my retirement, take a small church part-time and kind of “fade into the sunset.”

God had other plans; but he did not let me know that until recently. It is better that he did not.

In October 2025, my nineteenth year as pastor of Annville Zion EC Church, I noticed an article in the EC Leader which mentioned chaplain residency positions available at the Lebanon Veterans Administration Hospital. I thought, “That might be worth checking into after I retire, probably next Conference year (2027).” A series of unexpected events made it clear that God’s purpose was for me to begin that chaplain residency in August of 2026, a year sooner than I had planned.

Way back in 2011 I had taken a unit of CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education) at Hershey Medical Center, a part-time internship conducted while I pastored. It was challenging and growth-producing and helped me become a better pastor.

But by 2025, I thought, “I am 71. Do I really want to start a new career as I am preparing to retire?” Those “unexpected events” I mentioned practically propelled me into that change, and through another series of open doors and confirmations, I found myself “reporting for duty” at the VA New Employees Orientation, the oldest of four chaplain residents present. My first unit of CPE had taught me about self-examination; this residency took that practice much deeper. Under the guidance of a wise and seasoned chaplain, all four of us (my “cohort”) face ourselves honestly and compassionately and become better servants of the people we serve. I am learning to “get out of the way,” to be an agent which the Spirit might use for “this person before me right now.”

And I am learning this vital lesson - I cannot “fix” anybody. I had thought that is what pastors were supposed to do, to have solid biblical answers to people’s questions and struggles. Sometimes I did; sometimes I do. But I cannot “fix” anyone; that is the Holy Spirit’s work.



Ministerial Development Community News

CHAPLAINCY CORNER

Rev. W. Joel Copeland, Jr., Chaplaincy Committee Chair

You Want Me To Do WHAT?!

continued...

People typically seek pleasure and avoid pain. Part of our role is to help individuals deal with the pain they try to avoid. But we do not do that by “pulling strings with God” to “make things better.” Rather, we can be genuinely present with each person, available to walk with them toward their pain until they find what they need and celebrate with them.

Perhaps the Lord has nudged someone reading Bryan’s experience and testimony to consider chaplaincy work. There are opportunities for participating in future clinical pastoral residencies at Lebanon VA Medical Center (these are paid positions) as well as at other locations. Just give me a call or send me a text.

Rev. W. Joel Copeland, Jr., D.Min.
Ecclesiastical Endorser
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TWIN PINES

CAMP, CONFERENCE & RETREAT CENTER



An Update on Summer Camp Pricing at Twin Pines

Dear Twin Pines Families and Friends,

Thank you for being part of the Twin Pines community. We are grateful for the trust you place in us and for your partnership in a ministry that helps children, youth, young adults, and older generations grow in faith, build lasting friendships, and experience the love of Jesus Christ.

As we look toward next summer, I want to share why, after much prayer, thoughtful consideration, and careful financial analysis, we have determined that an increase in camp fees is necessary. We recognize that these changes affect families, and we want to explain the reasons behind the new pricing and how we plan to keep camp accessible while responsibly caring for the ministry God has entrusted to us.

Why are Camp Prices Increasing?

For many years, Twin Pines has kept camp fees low, considerably lower than those of most other Christian and secular camps throughout Eastern Pennsylvania. This reflects our longstanding commitment to making camp accessible to as many campers as possible. That commitment has been made possible, in large part, through the generosity of donors and supporters who help cover the difference between what families pay and the actual cost of providing camp.

Our 2026 standard fee for a full week of camp was \$368, while our current cost analysis indicates that providing a camper's week costs at least \$900. Food, staffing, insurance, utilities, maintenance, and the care of our 205-acre property all contribute to these costs. The full cost of providing camp reflects the many resources needed to offer a safe, welcoming, meaningful, and Christ-centered experience for every camper.

We are deeply thankful for the generosity that has sustained Twin Pines throughout its history. As costs continue to rise, we have prayerfully considered how families, churches, donors, and other supporters can share in supporting this ministry. Our goal is not simply to increase fees, but to care responsibly for the resources God provides so that Twin Pines can continue serving children and families for years to come.

A Five-Night Camp & Three Pricing Tiers

Beginning the summer of 2027, regular camp sessions will move from six nights to five nights. We know this is a change, but our commitment to providing the best camp experience remains unchanged.

We are also introducing three pricing tiers to give families flexibility in choosing a fee that best fits their circumstances while helping support the cost of camp. For the five-night camps:

Tier 1 — \$449: A historically subsidized rate that continues Twin Pines' longstanding commitment to affordability, with a greater portion of the cost supported through other sources.

Tier 2 — \$524: A partially subsidized rate that allows families to contribute more toward the cost of camp while still benefiting from the generosity of others.

Tier 3 — \$599: A sustaining rate for families who are able to contribute more, helping support the ministry and make camp more accessible to others.



TWIN PINES
CAMP, CONFERENCE & RETREAT CENTER

www.twinpines.org
3000 Twin Pines Camp Road,
Stroudsburg, PA 18360
(570)-629-2411



TWIN PINES

CAMP, CONFERENCE & RETREAT CENTER



This is a sample for our base camp fee structure. The shorter camps, Lotsa Love, and tripping camps will have different fees.

Families are invited to choose the tier that best fits their circumstances. All campers will receive the same fantastic experience. There is no need to explain or justify your choice. Each tier helps us share the cost of camp in a way that recognizes both the financial realities families face and the generosity that has long been part of the Twin Pines story. Even at Tier 3, the fee remains below our estimated full cost of providing camp.

We will continue to offer Camperships to campers that need additional assistance and recognize that the increase in fees may result in an increased demand for this fund. We are hopeful we will be able to continue to raise funds which make it possible for every camper who desires to attend camp, regardless of financial circumstances, to do so.

Moving Forward with Gratitude & Hope

We believe camp is an important ministry of the Church, providing opportunities for campers to step away from everyday distractions, experience God's creation, build meaningful relationships, and grow in their faith. As we move forward, we must strengthen our fundraising efforts and humbly invite individuals, churches, and ministry partners to support Camperships so that camp remains accessible to children and families, regardless of their financial circumstances.

We are committed to caring for today's campers while preparing for future generations. We recognize that these pricing changes may be difficult, and we are deeply grateful for your prayers, generosity, and continued partnership. With gratitude for God's provision throughout Twin Pines' history, we look to the future with hope, trusting in His continued faithfulness.

May Twin Pines remain a place where lives are changed, faith is strengthened, and children and other campers encounter the love of Christ.

The 2027 summer camp registration will be coming soon.

With gratitude and hope,

Tony Lea

CEO / Executive Director

Twin Pines Camp, Conference & Retreat Center

2027 SUMMER CAMP

Event	Dates
My First Camp	July 4-7, 2027
Elementary Igniters	July 4-9, 2027
Lotsa Love 1	July 4-9, 2027
Adult Camp	July 4-9, 2027
On the Edge	July 11-16, 2027
Outpost	July 11-16, 2027
Lotsa Love 2	July 11-16, 2027
Junior High Journeys	July 18-23, 2027
Wilderness Way	July 25-30, 2027
Moms & Gals	August 1-4, 2027
Dads & Lads	August 4-7, 2027
Family Camp	September 3-6, 2027



TWIN PINES
CAMP, CONFERENCE & RETREAT CENTER

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3000 Twin Pines Camp Road,
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(570)-629-2411

CALENDAR

NOVEMBER 2026

Sunday, November 1

Day of Prayer for Kingdom Extension
Daylight Savings Time Ends
Liturgical Color - Green

Tuesday, November 3

Election Day

Wednesday, November 4

Day of Prayer and Fasting for the EC Church
Finance Committee Meeting

Sunday, November 8

Liturgical Color - Green

Wednesday, November 11

Veterans Day

Sunday, November 15

Liturgical Color - Green

Sunday, November 22

Thanksgiving Sunday
Liturgical Color - White

Thursday, November 26

Thanksgiving Day
EC Church Center Closed

Friday, November 27

EC Church Center Closed

Sunday, November 29

First Sunday of Advent
Liturgical Color - Purple

DECEMBER 2026

Wednesday, December 2

Day of Prayer and Fasting for the EC Church

Sunday, December 6

Day of Prayer for Kingdom Extension
Second Sunday of Advent
Liturgical Color - Purple

Sunday, December 13

Third Sunday of Advent
Liturgical Color - Purple

Tuesday, December 15

Loan & Investment Committee Meeting

Sunday, December 20

Fourth Sunday of Advent
Christmas Missionary Offering*
Liturgical Color - Purple

Wednesday, December 23

EC Church Center Closed

Thursday, December 24

Christmas Eve
EC Church Center Closed

Friday, December 25

Christmas Day
EC Church Center Closed

Sunday, December 27

Liturgical Color - White

Monday, December 28

EC Church Center Closed

Thursday, December 31

New Year's Eve
EC Church Center Closed



**The deadline to
submit written
pastoral
changes is
January 1, 2027.**

**Ministry Funds, Insurance & Benefits and
Christmas Missionary Offering***

Mail to:

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



Built to Move

"For in him we live
and move and have
our being."
- Acts 17:28

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