DECEMBER 2026

EC LEADER

A publication of the Evangelical Congregational Church



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FROM THE DESK

Bishop Randy Sizemore

Watching and Waiting
Matthew 24:36-44

Carla and I were in Burlington, Vermont on their famous Church Street. We were all lined up, children in the front and adults in the back. We were dressed in our warm clothes holding cups of coffee and hot chocolate, and most of us were wearing the free reindeer antlers the local radio station was giving away. Then we heard it – the festive music that declared he was coming! Coming to our town! Then we saw him - in the distance sitting on top of the fire truck with his red suit, white beard, and gold-rimmed glasses.



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.

FROM THE DESK

Bishop Randy Sizemore

continued...

Watching and Waiting
Matthew 24:36-44

continued...

The children could hardly stand still with anxious anticipation. He was coming their way!

The parents? Different story. They were like, "Yeah, yeah, we've been through this drill a thousand times before, and while it's cute, I'm cold, I burnt my tongue on this over-priced coffee and have a whole list of things to do today."

Waiting. Watching. Advent. All points toward Christmas. In the season of Advent, we are watching and waiting for that day when Jesus will come.

Jesus' words in Matthew 24:36-44 come to a people who have been lined up like those children on Church Street, watching and waiting with growing impatience.

Jesus said, "I'll be back." The messengers at his ascension in Acts 1:11 said he would return in the same way they saw him go. But one day passed into another, and still Jesus had not returned. People watched. People waited. The first generation of Christians passed from the scene, and Jesus had yet not returned. They continued to watch and wait with less and less enthusiasm and growing disappointment.

When you think about it, disappointed watching and waiting is all we have ever known. If the early Church grew disappointed waiting for Jesus in the fifty to sixty years before Matthew wrote his Gospel, how much greater is our disappointment after waiting over 2,000 years?

How do we keep that necessary sense of eager anticipation and hope when we have been through so many Advent seasons, when we have been pacing the floor and looking out the window for Jesus to pull into the driveway for our entire lifetime?

We need a renewed sense of anticipation and hope! Anticipating Jesus' advent is more than eager expectation, it is the foundation of our hope. If we ever needed to line up in eager anticipation to watch and wait for something, hope is it! Deferred hope can turn joy to bitterness and dreams to despair even among believers. I am not sure if it is true, but there is a story often circulated about Martin Luther who was experiencing a time in his life when he was suffering from deep despair and depression. He could not seem to come out of it. Frustrated by it all, his wife came to breakfast one morning wearing a black arm band. "Who died?" asked Luther. His wife answered, "Well, with the way you've been carrying on around here, I thought God did."



FROM THE DESK

Bishop Randy Sizemore

continued...

Watching and Waiting
Matthew 24:36-44

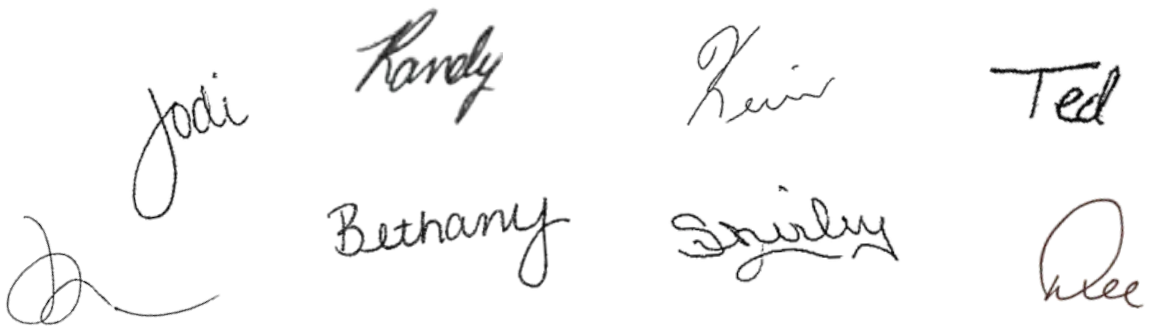
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Remember Y2K? Christian groups convinced that the change in the millennium will bring about the return of Jesus is nothing new. Over the centuries at various times, Christians have become convinced that Christ's second Advent was at hand. At the end of the year 1000, millions of Christians were filled with fear or eager anticipation. A great Mass was held by the Pope in Rome, and it was expected that before the midnight mass ended, Christ would return. But he did not. Again in 1900, Christians, many of them in America, became convinced that Jesus would return at the end of the year. He did not. It became known as "The great disappointment."

What is the solution to "the great disappointment?" How does God intend to keep within His people that spirit of anticipation and readiness for the return of Christ? The answer is simple yet complex. Jesus promises to dwell within and among his people even while they are waiting for him to return for them! As Ephesians 1:13-14 reminds us, *"And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession - to the praise of his glory."* Here is the greatest gift of Christmas: while Jesus did ascend back to the Father in person, He sent the Holy Spirit to live within us, guiding us and empowering us to live as those ready for his return. His presence in our lives is our joy, our strength and our hope - our guarantee that he who began a good work in us will complete it!

Be ready! Christ's return should not surprise us: we have been told to expect it! We sing, preach, teach, pray and write about it. We make books and movies about it, debate it and even joke about it. After at least 2,000 years, we should be the best prepared of all people. Matthew 24:42–43 calls us to be as ready for Christ's return as children are for Christmas morning. Jesus' imminent return should not breed fear in our hearts but hope! Isaiah 40:28-31 reminds us that even while we anticipate the return of Christ, he can renew our strength! *"Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not faint."*

Merry Christmas from all of us here at Church Center!



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR NEWS

KEVIN HENRY

As always, please email:

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

Kevin Henry
Executive Director
khenry@eccenter.com

with any questions or call 717.866.7581

The annual Treasurer's Guide and 2027 Ministry Fund forms are now available within the Members' section of the EC website under "Forms & Resources." Additionally, the updated Pastoral Compensation forms may be accessed online in the designated Members' section for your convenience.

A couple of end of the year reminders:

Pastoral Compensation Forms should be returned to the EC Church Center by December 31, 2026.

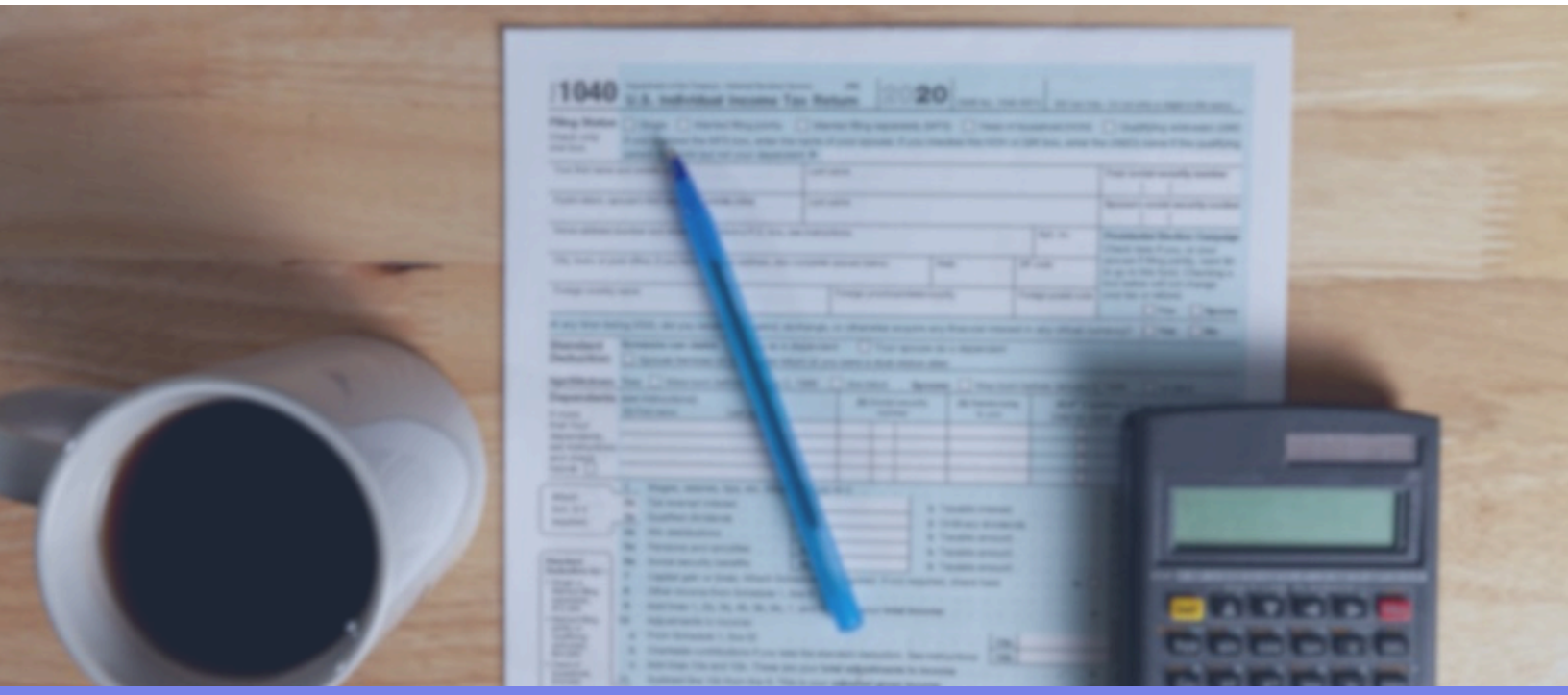
The Annual Statistical Report is due to the EC Church Center, 100 W Park Ave, Myerstown, PA 17067, by January 25, 2027. An electronic reporting option is available.

W-2 forms for employees (including pastors) and 1099-NEC forms for independent contractors are due by February 1, 2027, to the recipient and to the respective government agency. The 1099-NEC is a newer form, replacing the 1099-MISC, in most instances, for churches; for payments made during 2026, this form needs to be filed by February 1, 2027. Pastors are employees of the local church and should receive a W-2 with federal, state and local taxes withheld from every paycheck.

May you have a blessed holiday season celebrating the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ!

Kevin Henry
Executive Director

Bethany White
Benefits Corp Specialist



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 December quickly approaching, it is nearing 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 checks to be considered received by December 31 by postmark, they 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!

Dee





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

Rev. Matt Hill,
MDC Associate

"Calling Out the Called"

Several weeks ago, I had the privilege of representing our beloved denomination at the Novare Commons gathering in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Hosted and organized by Kairos University, the gathering was focused on the topic of pastoral formation. Seminary presidents, denominational leaders and the like gathered for one purpose, to discuss the need to identify, call out and resource future pastors of the Church.

Throughout the gathering, there was a sense of urgency: a fire that is burning in the bellies of leaders throughout the Church of North America, with the need to raise up and educate the next generation of pastors. At our latest CNT meeting, Bishop Randy asked about the sense of urgency in our own denomination and local congregations. Do we sense an urgency to share the Gospel? Do we sense an urgency to identify the leaders in the present and future Church?

In their book Calling Out the Called, authors Scott Pace and Shane Pruitt reflect on the growing trend around pastoral shortages, referencing the Barna Group study, "The Aging of America's Pastors." One statement continues to marinate in my mind and heart: "It is urgent that denominations, networks and independent churches determine how to best motivate, mobilize, resource and deploy more younger pastors. In other words, we must renew our commitment to passionately and persistently 'calling out the called!'"

I am grateful for the ministry of the Evangelical Congregational Church: for the forward thinking in the creation of the Pastoral Assessment Center, our Pastoral Residency program and pastoral recruitment team. Continue to keep these teams in your prayers as they seek to serve the Lord and "call out the called." But we as local congregations have our part to play in all of this, too!

In my own call to ministry, God used my parents, Sunday school teachers, my youth pastor and other leaders at the local level to ignite my heart toward vocational ministry. The wonderful news is that He is still in the business of "calling out the called!" We firmly believe the Lord has placed the next generation of pastors in our churches now that we might disciple and call out the called. So, will we join Him in this endeavor? Will we prayerfully petition our Father to raise up the next generation of pastors in our congregations? Will you consider sitting down over a cup of coffee this week and "call out the called"?

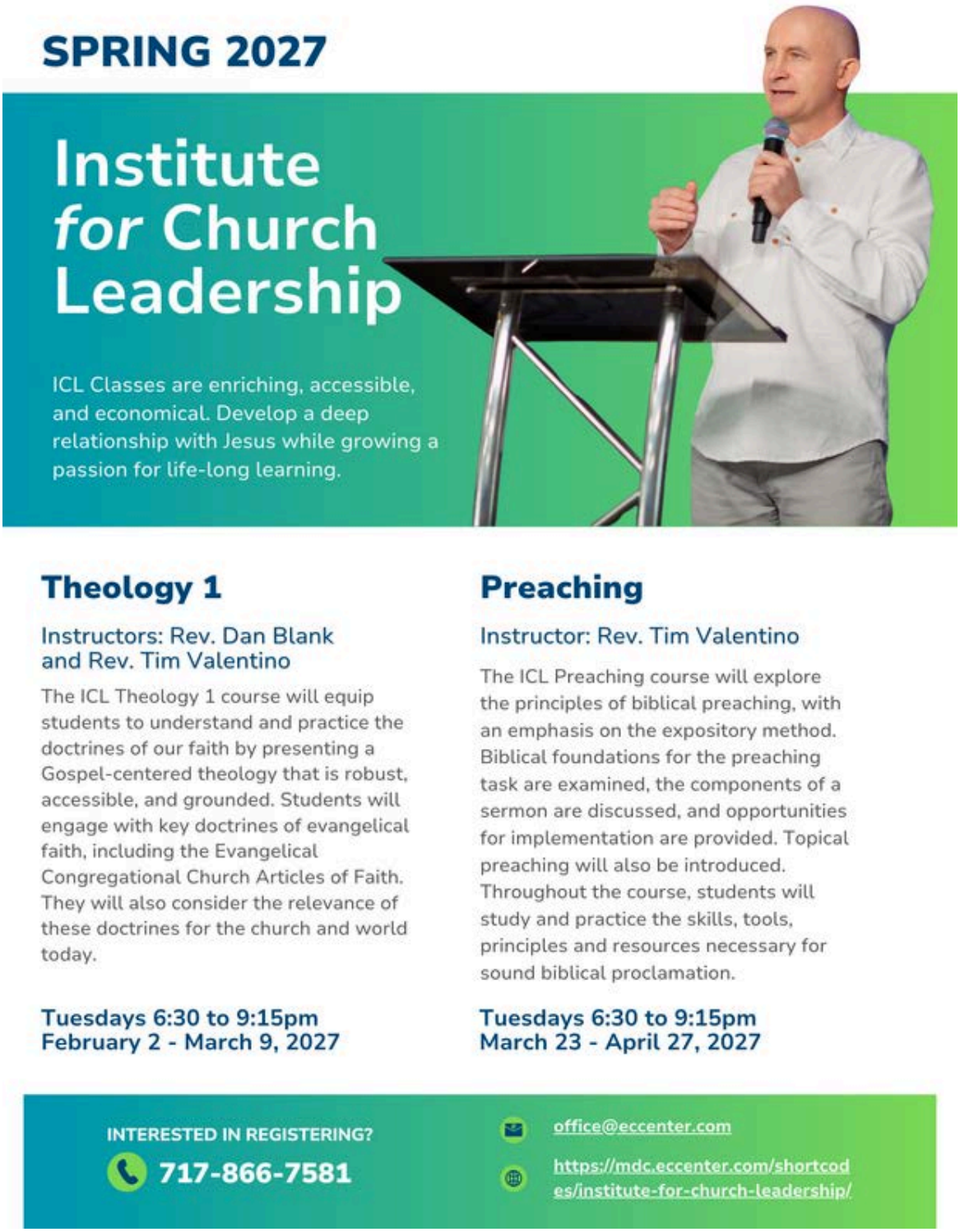
Matt



Ministerial Development Community News

ICL Update

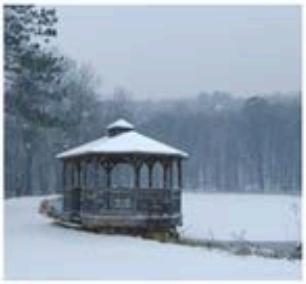
Registration for the Spring 2027 courses is now open at https://mdc.eccenter.com/shortcodes/institute-for-church-leadership/.



TWIN PINES
CAMP, CONFERENCE & RETREAT CENTER



A Season of Gratitude, Hope & Renewal



As we approach Christmas and the close of 2026, we have much for which to be thankful. Following a few challenging years, this year has been one of rebuilding, unexpected blessings, and renewed hope for Twin Pines Camp. Through it all, we have witnessed God's faithfulness and provision in remarkable ways. We are especially grateful for the many individuals, churches, donors, volunteers, staff, and board members who have faithfully walked alongside this ministry. Your prayers, generosity, encouragement, and hard work have made a difference. We are also thankful for another summer of ministry, where children and young people encountered Christ, developed friendships, and grew in their faith. The decisions made for Christ and the relationships strengthened remind us why Twin Pines exists and why this ministry remains so important.

One of the significant blessings of 2026 has been the progress made toward restoring the financial health of Twin Pines. Through the support of the Evangelical Congregational Church, we secured a long-term, low-interest loan to address our outstanding property tax burden. The interest rate is more than 20 percentage points lower than the county's tax payment plan, providing substantial savings and a more manageable path forward. Additionally, Aspen Lodge has now been granted property tax exemption, which is expected to reduce our future annual property taxes by approximately half. These are significant answers to prayer and important steps toward a more financially sustainable future. While there is still work ahead, we are grateful for God's provision and the generosity of those who have helped make this progress possible.

As we look toward 2027, we do so with sustained hope and a commitment to building a spiritually vibrant and healthy ministry. We will continue to strengthen our summer camp programs, expand opportunities for children, youth, adults, and families, while also growing our retreat ministry. We are working to improve our facilities, strengthen our staff and volunteer teams, and reconnect with churches and ministry partners. Changes to our program structure and pricing are being made thoughtfully, with a continued commitment to scholarships and making camp accessible to all families. We recognize that rebuilding takes time, but we are encouraged by the progress being made and the opportunities before us.

Christmas reminds us that our greatest hope is not found in circumstances, financial stability, or even the plans we make for the future, but in Jesus Christ. His birth is the wonderful reminder of God's love and faithfulness. As we celebrate the coming of our Savior, we are reminded that God continues to work through ordinary people, often in extraordinary ways. Twin Pines is an example of this. Our desire remains to make Christ known as the Author of His Word and His World, faithfully serving today's campers while preparing Twin Pines for generations yet to come.

From all of us at Twin Pines, we wish you and your family a very Merry Christmas and a blessed New Year! Thank you for being part of the Twin Pines family, for believing in this ministry, and for helping us move forward with grateful hearts and renewed hope. We look forward to all that God has in store for 2027.

With gratitude and hope,
Tony Lea
CEO / Executive Director
Twin Pines Camp, Conference & Retreat Center

TWIN PINES
CAMP, CONFERENCE & RETREAT CENTER

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

CALENDAR

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 Missions 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

JANUARY 2027

Friday, January 1
Deadline to Submit Written Pastoral Changes
New Year's Day
EC Church Center Closed

Sunday, January 3
Day of Prayer for Kingdom Extension
Liturgical Color - White

Monday, January 4
EC Church Center Closed

Tuesday through Thursday, January 5-7
Pastoral Assessment Center

Wednesday, January 6
Epiphany

Sunday, January 10
Liturgical Color - Green

Friday, January 15
Disability Fee Due

Sunday, January 17
Liturgical Color - Green

Monday, January 18
Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Sunday, January 24
Liturgical Color - Green

Monday, January 25
2026 Annual Reports Due

Friday, January 29
Episcopacy Committee Meeting

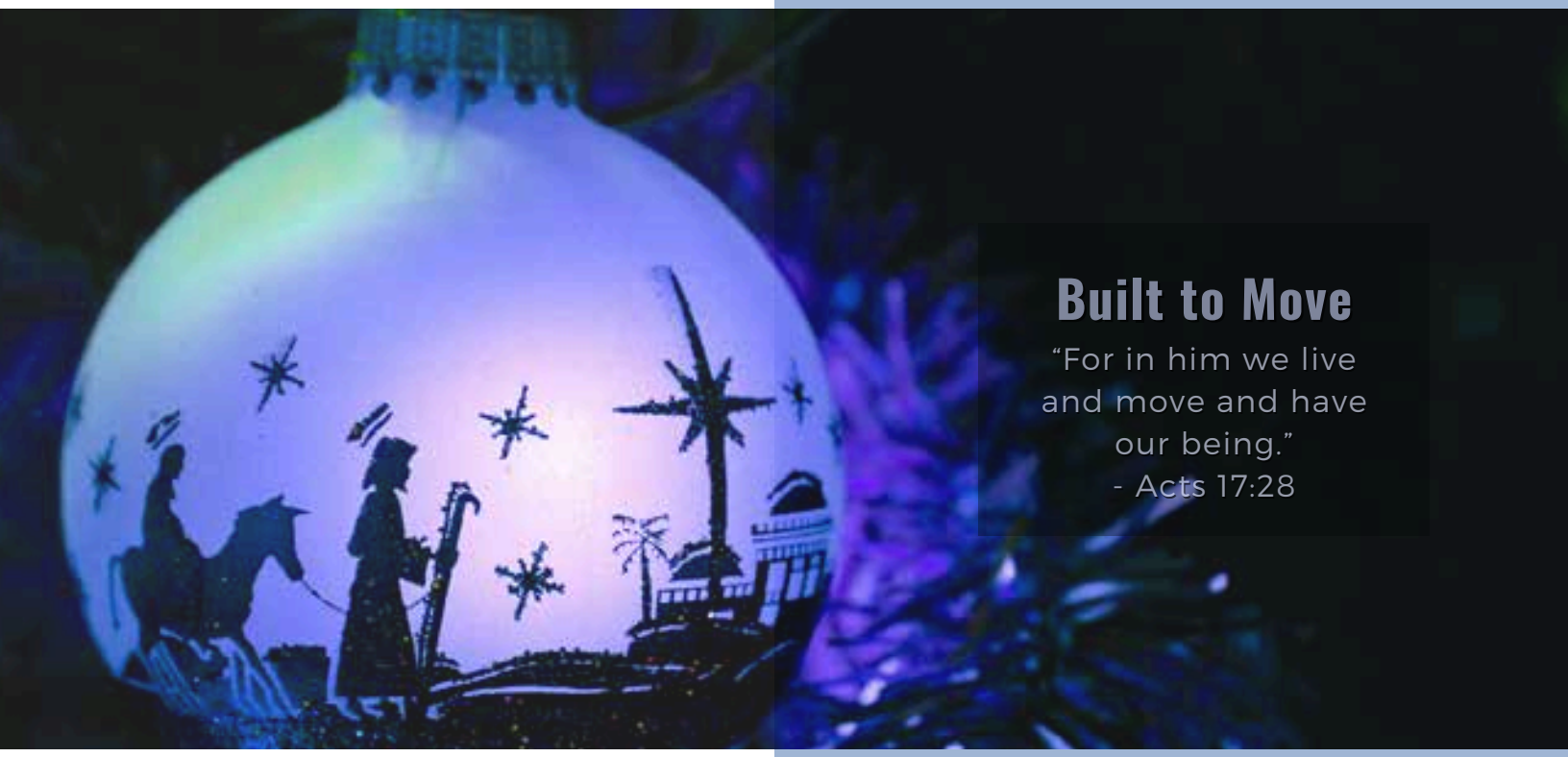
Sunday, January 31
Liturgical Color - Green

Ministry Funds, Insurance & Benefits and Christmas Missions Offering*

Mail to:

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

**** If you are sending a personal gift to a missionary and they reside in the United States, please send your gift directly to the missionary.***



Built to Move

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

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EC LEADER

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December 2026 Edition - Editor/Art Design

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