



## After the election, religious leaders try to bridge a political divide



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The morning after the election, a few dozen faith leaders sat quietly inside Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens in a room overlooking the gardens.

As rain beat down on the floor-to-wall windows, Cantor Kalix Jacobson of Temple Emanuel of South Hills pulled a ukulele from beneath a chair.

Softly, the cantor began to sing: "It's no secret, my heart is bleeding ... and I mean it; you can always call me."

Some of the leaders closed their eyes and swayed to the music, others reached for tissues as tears spilled from their eyes. The cantor wrote the song in the middle of the 2020 political divisiveness. Four years later, it resonates more now than it did before.

Months ago, faith leaders from across the Pittsburgh region agreed to meet on the day following the election regardless of the outcome of the presidential race, for a community conversation about political polarization and the fear of political violence.

In the lead-up to November, as Vice President Kamala Harris and former President Donald Trump made direct appeals to and stoked fears in faith communities across Pennsylvania — the most contested swing state — leaving many religious leaders struggling with polarized, divided communities.

Sponsored by the Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania and the Center for Loving Kindness at the Jewish Community Center, the Wednesday event, titled "We Have to Talk," aimed to help faith leaders reflect on the contentious election season and engage in discussions about how to bridge divides in their communities. Most of the conversations were candid, confidential, and at times tearful.

"Bridging political divides is a shared struggle and challenge for all faith leaders," said the Rev. Liddy Barlow, executive minister at Christian Associates. "And I think it's very important for people to engage as their whole selves, their real human emotions."

Because of Trump's win, the event took on a new role, too — it became a place to worry. Several faith leaders at the event spoke about their fear of a surge in threats or political violence in the wake of another Trump presidency.

For example, the former president has in recent months has amped up his anti-immigrant rhetoric, which, according to the Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection, has made immigrants more susceptible to political violence.

Trump hasn't spared faith communities, either — in September, he said Jewish-American voters would be partly to blame if he lost the election to Ms. Harris.

Rev. Barlow facilitated conversations about each person's emotions throughout the election cycle and how it impacted the diverse faith communities. Then, she asked them to describe moments of hope or unity.

Gwen Puza, a faith teacher at East Liberty Presbyterian Church, recalled a conversation with a woman who voted for Trump.

Ms. Puza said the woman told her she was anti-abortion due to her experiences as a nurse. Ms. Puza, who voted for Ms. Harris, understood her point, despite being a strong supporter of abortion rights. Before abortion was declared a nationwide constitutional right in 1973, Ms. Puza said her aunt died from the aftereffects of an illegal abortion.

"It was a very fruitful conversation, which doesn't happen often," she said.

Several faith leaders in attendance agreed it would be productive to hold more space for conversations across political divides. Rev. Barlow emphasized this sentiment.

"Sometimes there's a risk in feeling like we don't even have access to the people who don't agree with us," she said.

Before dispersing, the faith leaders agreed to meet again in January and discuss, among other things, skill-building workshops to facilitate healthy political discourse. As they put on their coats and hugged goodbye, several attendees offered to host their own events in the interim.

"Gathering like this helps faith leaders not feel alone," Rev. Barlow said.

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## Meet Rabbi Hindy Finman, the JCC's New Senior Director of Jewish Life

Rabbi Hindy Finman has joined the Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh (JCC) as senior director of Jewish life.

As part of the JCC's leadership team, Rabbi Hindy focuses on ensuring that Jewish values and expression remain intrinsic to the JCC's daily operation and many programs.

She is also guiding the organization's Center for Loving Kindness and Civic Engagement, founded in 2017 by Rabbi Ron Symons, the JCC's previous senior director of Jewish life. The center works to counter demoralizing rhetoric in public discourse and help people to live in shared harmony with one another through real and perceived differences.

One of Rabbi Hindy's goals is to continue to support the work of the JCC's Project UPstander, which engages volunteers in supporting neighbors impacted by hateful acts, violence, intolerance, or natural disasters.

"I have been in Pittsburgh since early June and already I can feel that people want to be activated," she says. "I can see that they want to help make much-needed changes in supporting folks across the divide.

"This want to help stems from kindness, a common Pittsburgh value I have experienced in the past months."

A native of Detroit, Rabbi Hindy pursued her rabbinical degree at Hebrew College in Newton, Massachusetts, and was ordained in June. She holds a degree in criminal justice from Temple University with a focus on youth impacted by the criminal justice system. During her career, she has worked with organizations including The Friendship Circle, Moishe House, and Camp Ramah.

"While we can always strive to do more, I have an amazing foundation to work on," says Rabbi Hindy, citing partnerships already in place when she joined the JCC. "In true Pittsburgh fashion, our work will focus on how to build more community bridges, not barriers. Together, we can eradicate hate and build peace with our neighbors."



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## COMMUNITY PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

# BRIDGING the Digital Divide

## AgeWell at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh and iServe



**Maddie Barnes**  
Director of Technology and Evidence-Based Programs, AgeWell at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh

### iServe School of Computing and Information

How can students leverage their technical skills to make an impact in nonprofit organizations? Pitt's iServe program is how. iServe aims to bridge the digital divide by connecting community partners with students to support meaningful volunteer projects.

The long-term partnership—a collaboration between PittServes and the School of Computing and Information—has had more than 200 students volunteer in the fall and spring terms to assist with projects such as designing and building websites, creating databases, maintaining social media accounts and tutoring.

In the AgeWell program at the Jewish Community Center (JCC) of Greater Pittsburgh, students tutor senior members, mostly in a one-on-one setting, on how to use technologies like smart phones and computers to support members' independence and social needs.

Maddie Barnes, Director of Technology and Evidence-Based Programs at AgeWell, explains that members

often need help with the basics. While this may sound rudimentary, mastering basic skills like sending photos or emailing helps keep members stay in contact with family and friends and maintain meaningful social connections.

Barnes emphasizes that the partnership with iServe is mutually beneficial for JCC's senior members and Pitt students. While members gain knowledge, students build valuable interpersonal skills.

"It takes a lot of patience," Barnes said. "It's a good experience for students to work in a professional setting with older adults." In a world where technology is rapidly changing and an ever-present part of our everyday lives, the need for tech support in older populations is increasingly necessary, and iServe is ready to take on that role.

## Center for Civil Rights and Racial Justice School of Law

The Center for Civil Rights and Racial Justice (CCRRJ) facilitates community-engaged teaching, research and service, and serves as a hub for Pitt Law's commitment to addressing legal issues related to civil rights and racial justice.

CCRRJ recently launched the Community Scholars Program to legally and financially support community partners in engaging on important projects. Some of these projects include injection clinics with Allegheny Reproductive Health Center; a study on the impacts of

urban redevelopment gentrification with the Hill District Consensus Group; and extending the reach of some projects already being undertaken by Valley Clean Air Now in terms of environmental justice issues in the City of Clairton.

More than \$15,000 in funding will be dispersed to such community organizations.

The Student Scholar/Summer Scholar Program was also launched to further graduate

students' endeavors, such as advancing civil rights and racial justice through academic, research, legal or practical applications, during the summer.

Seven Pitt students were named CCRRJ Scholar Award recipients, and each have been awarded \$1,000 grants to pursue issues that impact social justice.

**300** RESIDENTS AND STUDENTS PARTICIPATED IN CCRRJ ACTIVITIES IN 2023



# 10 ways to keep Pittsburgh kids busy over the holiday break: camps, activities and more

December 4, 2024 • Meg St-Esprit

*Photo above courtesy of the Heinz History Center.*

Many families look forward to the quiet days between the Christmas and New Year holidays, when schools are closed. But for many others, especially working parents, filling those days can feel daunting. Below you'll find a list of day camps and story times where kids can keep busy, as well as activities families can do together to break up the week and enjoy each other. We've also got guides to [holiday lights](#), [seasonal events around the region](#), and [holiday performances](#).

## **Carnegie Science Center Holiday Camps, North Side**

This year, the Carnegie Science Center will run camps on Dec. 26, 27 and 30. The camp is designed for kids ages 6–11 and runs from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day. The cost is \$75 per child per day, with a \$10 discount for CSC members. While some sessions are already sold out, most sessions still have space. Find out what's open and register [right here](#).



## J-Days Winter Break Camps at Jewish Community Center, Squirrel Hill

The JCC hosts great camps, events and athletics programs all year round, and winter break is no exception. J-Days this year run weekdays from Dec. 23 through Jan. 1, with the exception of Christmas Day. Camps run from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. for \$75 per day on field trip days and \$65 per day on other days. Before-care and after-care are available as well. Keep JCC in mind for snow days, too, as they often have spots. Find all the details [right here](#).



Photo courtesy of Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh

## Soccer Shots camp: Various locations

While Soccer Shots is known for its year-round leagues and classes, they also offer a winter break camp (under the title "Fall 2.0 camps") at SportsPlex in Greentree, North Park's Parish Hill Barn in Allison Park, and in Bethel Park to give parents a hand. For kids ages 4-7, there are morning and evening options. Along with soccer, these camps also offer crafts and fun daily themes. Learn more [here](#) or email [pittadmin@soccershots.org](mailto:pittadmin@soccershots.org) or call 412-615-5003.

## **Carnegie Libraries of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County Library Association Events**

Some of our local heroes — also known as librarians — continue to make magic throughout winter break. On the Carnegie Library [events page](#), there are various story times, kids' clubs and teen hangout events scheduled throughout late December. The Allegheny County Library Association also has a selection of story times and other events, which can be filtered by location [here](#). The libraries can be a good choice if you're a parent who needs to get remote work done over the holiday break while kids are busy at a story time or club.

### **Maker Monday projects**

Kidsburgh has dozens and dozens of easy, at-home maker projects that will keep kids busy creating art, learning about science and more. [Explore all the possibilities right here](#). Projects are designed to be done with supplies you may already have at home or can get inexpensively at a dollar store. And though we always recommend supervision, it's easy to find a project that bigger kids can do while adults are nearby but doing their own thing.

### **Western Pennsylvania Model Railroad Museum, Gibsonia**

Each November, the volunteers at this delightful train display open up for nearly two months of fun. Families can visit the display, located on the second floor of the museum, which is a model of the Pittsburgh region as seen from the Mon Valley to Downtown. You'll find intricate detail and history woven into every scene. Visitors can get very close to each part of the display, then visit the lower floor of the museum for more hands-on activities, a gift shop and a snack bar. Admission is \$5 for kids and \$10 for adults. The museum is open now through Jan. 14 from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., excluding holidays. On Fridays evenings, they are open until 9 p.m. for a special twilight display of the railroad. In January, the museum is only open on weekends. Find all the details [right here](#).

Photo courtesy of Western Pennsylvania Model Railroad Museum.

### **The UPMC Rink at PPG Place**

While it's been open for several weeks, the rink at PPG Place that surrounds one of Pittsburgh's iconic trees has extended skating hours over winter break (through March 2). While packed weekend nights can be tricky at the rink for inexperienced skaters, weekdays are a lot calmer. So bring your kids and take a spin. The rink is open from 10 a.m. to 11 p.m. Dec. 15 through Jan. 7. Find all the ticketing info and full hours [here](#).

Photo courtesy of UPMC Rink at PPG Place.

### **Children's Museum of Pittsburgh, North Side**

The Children's Museum isn't offering day camp options this year, but they are opening [an hour early each day](#) from Dec 26 through Dec. 29, and again on Jan. 2. That means they will be open at 9 a.m. rather than the usual 10 a.m., and MuseumLab will be open each of those days from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. There are several

days the museum will close at 3 p.m. so please check their [website](#) for details on classes, workshops, and specific hours. Admission for non-members is \$18 for adults and \$16 for kids ages 2–18. Don't forget the Children's Museum participates in [Museums for All](#), which offers free or discounted admission for those who qualify.

### **Sen. John Heinz History Center, Smallman Street**

For several years in a row, the History Center has offered free admission for the entire month of December for anyone 17 and younger thanks to a generous sponsorship by Howard Hanna Real Estate Services. That means winter break is a great time to bring the family and spend a day exploring. You'll find a fantastic showcase of local history with plenty of interactive exhibits, a special area for kids to move and run, and an interactive model of the city in the lobby with a Liberty Tubes tunnel slide. (We love the name, by the way: "Kidsburgh.") Details can be found [here](#).

Dining at Heinz History Center.

### **The Fort Pitt Museum**

Located adjacent to Point State Park, the Fort Pitt Museum is part of the Smithsonian family of local museums, along with the Heinz History Center. That means, like the History Center, it's free throughout December for kids 17 and younger. Even young kids enjoy learning about the history of Pittsburgh at the small museum, which is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. during break, excluding Christmas and New Year's Day. Find all the details about visiting [here](#).

Looking for more to do? Don't miss our guide to [drive-through lights](#), [holiday season events](#), and [Pittsburgh's First Night celebration](#).

## TOPICS

[Parenting Resources](#) [Resources](#)

Meg St-Esprit 