

**“To know Him and make Him known”**

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**Newsletter  
Submissions for the  
June issue are due  
July 26th**

## PASTOR'S MESSAGE

### EPC GENERAL ASSEMBLY RECAP 2026

Dear UPC Family,

I want to share some reflections from the EPC's 46th General Assembly in Denver.

I have been part of the EPC for sixteen years—as a Ruling Elder, seminarian, and now a Teaching Elder. During those sixteen years, I have attended General Assembly twelve times, and it has always been a highlight of my summer. This year, however, felt different. There was a heaviness in the air throughout the meeting, and rightly so, as we discussed and voted on several important matters, including reports from two Ad-Interim Committees.

On Wednesday, the Assembly heard from the Ad-Interim Committee on Ordination Standards. Over the past three years, this committee has been working to create a clearer path to ordination in the EPC.

In 2023, the General Assembly approved the creation of this committee for the purpose of reviewing our ordination standards and process.

One reason for this review is the overwhelming data pointing to the decline of people pursuing vocational ministry and traditional theological degrees such as the Master of Divinity (M.Div.), which has long been considered the gold standard for ordination preparation.

Due to changes in accreditation requirements over the years, the M.Div. degree is no longer uniform among seminaries. Some institutions still maintain the traditional 90-plus credit-hour degree, while others have reduced their programs to the minimum 72-credit-hour threshold. As a result, there can be significant differences in the preparation and training of ministerial candidates.

One of the committee's recommendations was to condense what had become three, sometimes confusing, pathways to ordination into a single, clearer process.

Previously, candidates could pursue a traditional seminary education and earn an M.Div. degree as part of their preparation for ordination.

Other candidates might possess graduate-level theological education but not an M.Div. specifically. These individuals entered the Candidate Educational Equivalency Program (CEEP), where educational deficiencies could be addressed through additional coursework, and prior ministry experience could be considered and credited to the candidate by the ordaining presbytery.

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Finally, there was the category of Extraordinary Candidate, in which educational requirements could be waived under exceptional circumstances. Some have jokingly referred to this as the "nuclear option."

The committee recognized the need for a uniform standard for all candidates and proposed a new set of "Criteria for Ordination Requirements and Education." Under this proposal, all candidates would complete at least 72 hours of transcript graduate-level coursework, including the biblical languages. The process would also include a new assessment modeled after those currently used for EPC church planters and world outreach workers, as well as a demonstration of pastoral competencies and ministry skills within a local church context.

While I appreciate the work of the Ad-Interim Committee and supported many of its recommendations, I could not support reducing the educational requirement for ordination to the minimum 72 graduate credit hours. Given the proposed coursework requirements, I believe there are significant weaknesses in the areas of Systematic Theology, Biblical Theology, and Historical Theology that would not be adequately addressed through a ministry internship alone.

There is a long-running joke that pastors only work one day a week. Beneath the humor lies a misunderstanding of the pastoral vocation. Most people in the pew—and many seminarians entering ministry—do not fully grasp the spiritual, emotional, and physical demands of pastoral work. Ministry is a calling of service and sacrifice.

When a young man senses a call to pastoral ministry and the church affirms that call, he should be prepared as thoroughly as possible for what lies ahead. The church is often messy because people are messy. Pastors are called to enter into that brokenness, not stand apart from it. They walk alongside people through grief, conflict, sin, suffering, and doubt while continually confronted by their own limitations and weaknesses. Yet by God's grace they persevere, pointing people to Christ, who alone is able to bring healing, restoration, and hope.

The classroom cannot prepare a minister for every situation he will face. Much of pastoral ministry is learned through experience. Nevertheless, that reality should not lead us to lower our academic expectations. Rigorous theological training helps shape both the mind and heart of a minister. Sound academics do not create cold shepherds; they help form capable shepherds who can faithfully teach God's Word, think carefully, and apply biblical truth to situations that seminary could never fully anticipate.

One comment from the committee chair particularly stood out to me. During both the report and the question-and-answer period, he repeatedly emphasized that the primary challenge in the church's leadership pipeline does not begin at the seminary level. It begins in the local church.

That observation deserves our attention. How serious are we about discipleship? Are we truly seeking to know Christ and make Him known—to present every believer mature in Christ? Are we intentionally raising up men and women who love Christ, love His church, and are prepared to serve Him wherever He calls?

These questions should shape everything we do as a congregation. Whether in worship, Sunday School, Growth Groups, Children's Ministry, or simply in the ordinary rhythms of life together, we should continually ask ourselves: What are we trying to accomplish? Certainly, there are many good goals, but among our highest priorities must be equipping the saints for the work of ministry so that the Word of God would multiply, and Christ be glorified.

I must admit that my view on this issue did not prevail. The Assembly voted to approve the Ad-Interim Committee's recommendations on Ordination Standards. Nevertheless, that does not prevent us from faithfully pursuing the work of discipleship and raising up the next generation of church leaders here at Union Presbyterian Church.

May this remain an ongoing concern and prayer for our congregation.

On Thursday, the Assembly heard from the Ad-Interim Committee on Same-Sex Attraction and Ordination Standards. This report generated significant discussion both before and during the Assembly and was one of the primary reasons commissioner attendances was so high this year.

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In 2024, several presbyteries overtured the General Assembly, requesting that the denomination take a stand on what has been labeled “Side B Christianity.” For those unfamiliar with the term, I would commend to you the distinction made by TE Cameron Shaffer, who chaired this committee. He writes:

*"The discussion surrounding the term "gay Christian" often centers on two movements within gay Christianity. "Side A" affirms both same-sex attraction and homosexual practice as legitimate expressions of Christian sexuality, contrary to the historic teaching of the church.*

*Side B," by contrast, affirms the historic Christian sexual ethic that sex is reserved for marriage between one man and one woman. Side B proponents believe homosexual practice and lust are sinful, yet some still identify themselves as gay. They do so in one of two ways.*

*First, some use "gay" to describe a persistent orientation toward people of the same sex that includes deep desires for intimacy, friendship, companionship, and appreciation, without necessarily implying sexual desire. In this view, being gay describes who one is drawn toward rather than how those desires are expressed. Such desires, they argue, can be sanctified and expressed through chaste friendship.*

*Second, others use "gay Christian" to describe an ongoing experience of same-sex temptation. Similar to the phrase "struggling with same-sex attraction," the term acknowledges a persistent pull toward homosexual temptation while affirming a commitment to resist it. In this sense, "gay" refers to the direction of one's temptations rather than the practice of sin.*

*Both these ways of self-describing as a gay Christian go together. Sin corrupts our desires and affinities, so any special or intense or deep longing for relationships with people of the same sex will inevitably be corrupted by our sin nature and will inevitably have the good desires tempted towards a sinful fulfillment. This is an area where I sharply dissent from the Side B movement: a same sex orientation is always accompanied by a specific temptation to sexual sin, even if the orientation is not always accompanied by a sinful desire. A same-sex orientation's defining feature is an orientation towards temptation or sin, and therefore cannot be celebrated."*

I would agree with this conclusion, which I believe reflects the historic position of our denomination.

The committee was charged with reviewing the EPC Position Paper on Human Sexuality, the Pastoral Letter on Same-Sex Attraction, and the Book of Order, and recommending potential changes that would clarify, align, and strengthen our witness to the larger world in the areas of:

- **Theological anthropology**, with respect to human sexuality as it pertains to contemporary concepts of sexual self-conception and how such language comports with Scripture and the Westminster Standards.
- **Progressive sanctification** and how it informs the Reformed understanding of the mortification of sin and the doctrine of repentance.
- **Concupiscence** (disordered desires), as it relates to a Reformed conception of the Christian's new nature in Christ and when homosexual temptation, like other temptations, disqualifies one from ordained office;
- **The Christian hope** for those who experience and flee sexual temptation, especially homosexual temptation; and
- **How the answers to these questions might inform standards for officers** who have struggled in these areas but have mortified such temptations and desires.

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However, many in our denomination found the committee's recommendations unsatisfactory, believing they "left a door open for the ordination of celibate homosexuals."

Having read and reread the committee's proposals, I do not believe they create the opening that some fear they do.

To quote from the proposed changes to the EPC Book of Order and the Position Paper on Human Sexuality:

*"Whether single or married, officers in the EPC must conform to the biblical requirement of chastity and sexual purity (see Westminster Larger Catechism Q&A 138-139) in their descriptions of themselves, their convictions, character and conduct.... Officers in the EPC must be above reproach in their walk and Christlike in their character. While office bearers will see spiritual perfection only in glory, they all continue in this life to confess and to mortify remaining sins in light of God's work of progressive sanctification. Therefore, to be qualified for office, they must affirm the sinfulness of fallen desires, the reality of hope of progressive sanctification, and be committed to the pursuit of Spirit empowered victory over their sinful temptations, inclinations, and actions."*

From the conclusion of the EPC Paper on Human Sexuality,

*"We in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church resolve to teach biblical truths of godly sexuality to our members and to all who will listen, with compassion and with courage, regardless of the cost to ourselves. To do otherwise would be a failure of love. We will strive by God's grace to discipline our personal lives and our local churches in accordance with God's Word. God helping us, we shall continue, within our churches and in the public arena, to teach against and to refuse to condone or participate in any sinful form of sexual practice - including sexual abuse, pornography, sexual lust, extra-marital sex, adultery, polygamy, unbiblical divorce and remarriage, homosexual conduct, same-sex union and marriage, and gender reassignment."*

Again, I do not believe these recommendations open a pathway to the progressive agendas that have killed so many mainline Protestant denominations.

One reason I cannot describe this year's General Assembly as a high point of my summer is that, at its heart, I believe our denomination is united in its desire to uphold the authority of God's Word and proclaim the truth of the gospel regarding human sexuality. Yet the 60–40 vote in favor of the Ad-Interim Committee's recommendations has left many with the impression of deep division.

For my part, I believe these recommendations strengthen our witness to Christ and His gospel, providing helpful guidance and guardrails for presbyteries and sessions as they examine candidates for office in the church. At the same time, I recognize that many faithful brothers and sisters who share the same commitment to biblical authority reached a different conclusion. Regardless of how one voted, the debate felt like a loss, revealing strains within our denomination that could not be ignored.

The recommendations will now return to the presbyteries for a final vote. Twelve of our sixteen presbyteries must approve these recommendations before next year's General Assembly for them to take effect.

This is a brief snapshot of this year's assembly. Please reach out to me if you would like to talk further about the happenings in our denomination.

In the meantime, I encourage you to join me in praying for the EPC. Pray that the truth of God's Word would prevail, that Christ would purify and strengthen His church, and that the Lord, in His mercy, would grant us greater unity, reconciliation, and peace. Above all, may the grace and glory of Jesus Christ spread to every corner of the earth.

Soli Deo Gloria, Jeremy

# STRAWBERRY SOCIAL



**ORGAN CONCERT**  
★ ORGANIST BOB TRIMBLE ★  
SUNDAY, JULY 5TH  
@ 6:30PM



Jazi Diaz

\*\*\*Please note that the church picnic is a week early on July 19th since the new flooring is being installed in the memorial hall the following week.



2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1 10:00 Prayer Mtg	2 Yard Sale Drop-off Day 8-Noon NO DEACON MEETING	3 1:30 Kirkwood Growth Groups	4 Yard Sale Drop-off Day 8-Noon <i>Independence Day</i>
5 COMMUNION 8:30 Prayer Meeting 9:00 Sunday School 10:00 Worship 6:30pm Organ Concert	6 6:30 Octorara Pines Growth Group	7 Yard Sale Drop-off Day 8-Noon	8 10:00 Prayer Mtg	9 Yard Sale Drop-off Day 8-Noon	10 7:00 - 1:00 Yard Sale 1:30 Kirkwood Growth Groups	11 7:00 - 1:00 Yard Sale 2:00 Leftovers are free
12 8:30 Prayer Meeting 9:00 Sunday School 10:00 Worship	13 6:30 Octorara Pines Growth Group	14 7:00pm Trustee Meeting	15 10:00 Prayer Mtg	16	17 1:30 Kirkwood Growth Groups	18
19 8:30 Prayer Meeting 9:00 Sunday School 10:00 Worship Church Picnic	20 6:30 Octorara Pines Growth Group	21	22 10:00 Prayer Mtg	23	24 1:30 Kirkwood Growth Groups	25
26 8:30 Prayer Meeting 9:00 Sunday School 10:00 Worship	27 6:30 Octorara Pines Growth Group	28	29 10:00 Prayer Mtg	30	31 1:30 Kirkwood Growth Groups	

# FOOD BANK

Canned pasta, Triscuits/ Wheat Thins crackers, chicken noodle soup (10 oz can size), seafood soup/chowder (cans), diapers (size 5, 6, 7 and 3T, 4T, 5T), baby wipes, mayonnaise, peanut butter crackers (packs), pudding cups, granola bars

## **Solanco Neighborhood Ministries Backpack/School Supplies Give-Away**

We are currently collecting school supplies for our annual Back-to-School Giveaway to be held at the end of summer.

We are in need of donations of:

Backpacks (for all grade levels), Spiral notebooks, 3-ring binder notebooks, Notebook paper, Pencils, pens, Composition books, Notecards, Pocket Folders, Colored markers, Highlighter markers, Colored pencils, Glue, Rulers, Pencil erasers, Crayons, Small hand sanitizer, small packs of Kleenex tissues, small kid-sized toothbrushes, small kid-friendly toothpaste, NEW bags of boys/girls socks, NEW bags boys/girls underwear

Please deliver donations to our "Drop Off Room" by Monday, Aug. 10<sup>th</sup>.  
14 S. Church Street, Quarryville, PA 17566

## LECTIONARY PASSAGES

### July 5<sup>th</sup>

#### **14<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67;  
Psalm 45:10-17;  
Romans 7:15-25a;  
Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

### July 12<sup>th</sup>

#### **15<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Genesis 25:19-34;  
Psalm 119:105-112;  
Romans 8:1-11;  
Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

### July 19<sup>th</sup>

#### **16<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Genesis 28:10-19a;  
Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24;  
Romans 8:12-25;  
Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

### July 26<sup>th</sup>

#### **17<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Genesis 29:15-28;  
Psalm 105:1-11, 45b;  
Romans 8:26-39;  
Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52



- 1 Michael Graver
- 2 Dorothy Harvey  
Robyn Ferguson  
Kristin Fuller
- 5 Daniel McCardell  
Valerie Williams  
Joseph Greer
- 8 Karen Greer
- 9 Joseph Jackson
- 10 John Hastings
- 12 Mary Lou Shaub
- 18 Matthew Adams  
Barbara Pyle
- 19 Brenda Wade
- 23 Jeremy Peterson
- 24 Jennifer Jackson  
Ben Dougherty
- 27 Robert Greenleaf
- 29 Sandra Graver

## GREETERS

- 5 Sandy Looney
- 12 (OPEN)
- 19 (OPEN)
- 26 (OPEN)

## LET'S TALK YARD SALE

Mark your calendars! The Union Church Yard Sale is: Friday, July 10th 7:00 to 1:00 and Saturday, July 11th 7:00 to 1:00. Keep in mind that we are offering anything left over from the sale from 1:00 to 2:00 for FREE! Drop off dates are: 8:00 to 12:00 Tues. June 30, Thurs. July 2, Sat. July 4, Tues. July 7, Thurs. July 9.

You can drop off nicely packed boxes, with the lids closed, in the coat room, at this time. Please stack them nicely and as high you can, so we can get lots of items in that room. Please remember we would appreciate it, if you could wait till the drop off dates. We will have people willing to help unload your car at those times. I know we are all excited for this event. When we all work together, great things happen! Any questions see Colleen Sheaffer or call her at 717-917-1076.

Union Presbyterian Church  
5637 Street Road,  
Kirkwood, PA 17536



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UPC VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL

# JESUS IS THE LIGHT

*"I am the light of the world" - John 8:12*




**DATE:** Tuesday - Thursday, August 4-6, 2026

**TIME:** 9:00 am to Noon

**PLACE:** Union Presbyterian Church  
5637 Street Road, Kirkwood


**GRADES:** Kindergarden through 5<sup>th</sup> grade

**HOSTED BY:** **SCAN TO REGISTER:** 

MIDDLE SCHOOL VBS

# JESUS IS THE LIGHT

*"I am the light of the world" - John 8:12*





**DATE:** Tuesday - Thursday, August 11-13, 2026

**TIME:** 6-8:00 pm


**PLACE:** Union Presbyterian Church  
5637 Street Road, Kirkwood

**GRADES:** 6<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup>

**SCAN TO REGISTER:**  **HOSTED BY:** Middle Octorara Presbyterian Church



Little Britain Presbyterian Church  
A Witness to Our Community



UNION Presbyterian Church  
To Know Him Is To Know Life