

Congregational Learning Day 2026



For New and Experienced Church Leaders and Church Members

Saturday, March 7, 2026

Registration must be completed by February 28th

Schedule:

8:30 - 8:55 CLD 2026 Meet and Greet

9:00 - 10:30 Session 1

- Anti-racism Training: Envisioning Our Values*
- Deacon Training
- Elder Training
- Grants
- New Worshipping Communities

10:30 - 10:45 Break

10:45 - 11:15 Worship

11:15 - 12:45 Session 2

- Anti-racism Training: Enacting Our Values*
- Can We Talk?
- Caring for Our Immigrant Neighbors
- Stated Clerk Training

*Taking both Anti-Racism classes qualifies for Anti-Racism training

9 AM Session



Anti-Racism Training: Envisioning Our Values:

This workshop will explore the historical journey that led to the General Assembly's Antiracism Policy and the development of the Antiracism Policy for the Presbytery of Genesee Valley. We will discuss the next steps churches can take in formulating their own individual policies. A case study will be presented on the implementation of an antiracism policy and training program at Third Presbyterian Church, along with an overview of the Racial Justice Peace and Advocacy Working Group's experience in administering the Matthew 25 Fund. Additionally, there will be ample time for questions, conversation, and suggestions regarding our next faithful steps forward. [Register Here:](#)

Speakers: Dr Janette Henderson began her career as a Speech/Language Pathologist. She then completed a Masters in Phonetics at Essex University in England and later a Ph.D. in linguistics at the University of Connecticut. She and her husband then moved to Rochester where she worked in speech research at Syracuse University and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf at RIT. A life-long Presbyterian, she is a member and the Clerk of Session at First Presbyterian Church of Pittsford. She became interested in social



justice and joined the PGV Racial Justice Peace and Advocacy Working Group, which she now chairs. She recently completed a course at Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary and earned a Certificate in Public Theology (Martin Luther King Cohort, 2024).

Beth Laidlaw is an elder at Third Presbytery Church, a mom, grandmother, and Professor of Philosophy Emerita.



Equipped to Care, A workshop for Deacons: This workshop is designed as training for Deacons and all other lay pastoral caregivers. Are you on your church's Pastoral Care Team, or Member Care Committee that your Session has appointed to be in charge of congregational care - then this is for you too! Join us to learn about practical tools and concepts to hone your skills for ministering to those experiencing grief, loss, illness, caretaking responsibilities, and much more. We hope new and returning participants to the course will leave feeling equipped to minister to those who are in the valleys of their lives. [Register Here:](#)

Speaker: Rev Erin Jacobson, an Associate Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Pittsford, NY. Erin is passionate about training and equipping all church members (not just Deacons and Elders) to be confident in offering pastoral care. In addition to a Master of Divinity from Princeton Theological Seminary, Erin holds a Master of Science in Early Childhood Education and Development from the Margaret Warner School at the University of Rochester, and a Bachelor of Arts in English from Ithaca College. In addition to ministry, Erin's professional experience has also included time teaching in public schools in both New York and Louisiana.



Leading to Serve – The Role of the Ruling Elder: “Servant leadership” is often lifted up as a high goal and defining characteristic for Ruling Elders in the modern-day Presbyterian church. In order to set healthy and helpful expectations, it can be really helpful to define the term. Being an Elder is so much more than being a chief volunteer in a community. It is so much more than being part of the emergency response team for institutional crisis or members’ concerns. It is so much more than simply doing what the Pastor wants you to do. Being an Elder is a position of invaluable spiritual and relational leadership that facilitates the capability of a faith community to be in service to Christ and the children of God. Let’s talk about what you signed up for and the beautiful possibilities of your service. [Register Here:](#)

Speaker: Rev. Colin Pritchard



I have been a Teaching Elder in the PCUSA for 25 years. During that time I have served as: a new church development pastor, the Head of Staff for two established congregations, a national coach for 1001 New Worshipping Communities, a coach for Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, a cohort mentor for the Early Ministry Institute, a three time delegate to the General Assembly, the Moderator of the Presbytery of Genesee Valley, a musician for multi-presbytery youth conferences and Camp Whitman summer programs, and the Peer Support Chaplain for Ontario County Sherriff’s Office and the Geneva PD. Currently I am privileged to be the Pastor of The Presbyterian Church in Geneva. I delight in all the

ways God is guiding the people of PCUSA to vital ministries for the days ahead, and look forward to walking that road together.

Grants: This workshop will show you how your prayers may be answered through Grants and Scholarships provided through the Presbyterian Network. It will guide

you in discovering the most suitable grants for your congregation, where to look for various funding opportunities, mastering the art of grant writing, and identifying key organizations and foundations that offer these essential resources. The Presbytery of Genesee Valley, Synod of the Northeast, PCUSA, and the Presbyterian Foundation will join together to help identify and explore your spiritual needs. [Register Here:](#)

Speakers: Rev. Dr. Rose Niles is a Ministry Relations Officer for the Northeast Region, working with congregations to foster generosity, deliver seminars and workshops, develop fundraising strategies, and coach finance-related committees. Previously, she was Development Officer at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary and Associate for Theological Education and Seminary Relations. Rose has pastored churches in New York and Louisville, held leadership roles in the Synod of the Northeast, and taught at New York Theological Seminary—including in Sing-Sing prison. She graduated from Bronx High School of Science, Harvard University, and New York Theological Seminary. Her family resides in Los Angeles, California.



Rev. Judy Lee Hay chairs the Grants Working Group of the Presbytery of Genesee Valley. She is the former pastor of Calvary St. Andrew's Presbyterian Parish, an urban congregation in Rochester, NY, former Executive Director of South Wedge Planning Committee Inc, a not-for-profit housing corporation, and former staff in PCUSA in Congregational Transformation. Presently, Reverend Hay serves in a voluntary capacity as Chair of the Swillburg Neighborhood Association and co-leader of NBN6, a collaboration of 6 South east Rochester neighborhoods.



Michael Yeoman serves as Grant Coordinator for the Synod of the Northeast, helping to strengthen innovative ministries across the region. In this role, he is the Synod's point of contact for most of the grants funded by the Synod, including Innovation Grants, Campus Ministries Grants, Emerging Gospel Communities Grants, Youth and Young Adult Leadership Grants, as well as Ecumenical and Connectional Ministry Grants. Michael is a resource to the Synod Presbyteries and congregations and provides advice on applying for grants, establishing budgets, strengthening sustainability, and preparing progress reports. In addition to his work with the Synod, Michael is currently serving in his sixth year as a full-time pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Oneida. His ministry has also included service to the congregations of Boonville and Verona, NY, where he faithfully guided communities of faith while also working as Program Director for the



Rescue Mission of Utica. He currently serves as Moderator of the Coordinating Council for the Presbytery of Utica.

Frank Strock is an affiliate member of the First Presbyterian Church of Batavia, NY, within the PGV. He has been a member of the Brick Presbyterian Church in NYC since 1974 and is actively involved in the tools and training group of PGV. He proudly affirms his faith with the words, "Praise Jesus Christ, Amen."

Rev. Michael Gehrling is passionate about helping communities rely increasingly on the Holy Spirit. He believes that ancient practices of discernment can lead communities to innovative new ministries, that our best tool for making new disciples is prayer, and that the best way a person can grow in their faith is to share it with others. Michael is the 1001 New Worshipping Communities Associate for Recruitment and Assessments. In this role, he walks alongside innovative leaders as they discern the new things God is calling them and the church to create together. He also aids presbyteries and worshipping communities in developing faithful practices to cultivate innovation among their people. Additionally, Michael is co-editor and a contributing author to the book *Sustaining Grace: Innovative Ecosystems for New Faith Communities*. He is also a certified Clifton Strengths Coach with Gallup. Michael is based in Pittsburgh, and when he's not working, he can often be found enjoying his favorite hobby – West Coast swing dancing



New Worshipping Communities: Speaker: Kevin Hershey is a Teaching Elder in the PC(USA) and a New Monastic Monk. He pastors Union Presbyterian Church and the 1001 New Worshipping Community, Companions on the Way, both in the Presbytery of Genesee Valley. In that Presbytery, he serves on the New Faith Community Advocacy and Youth and Youth Adults working groups, and the Mission Commission. His other work includes leading retreats, offering spiritual direction, and volunteering with Camp Whitman. He loves spending time with his wife and daughters, hiking and camping, and is a huge Disney geek and Mr. Rogers devotee.



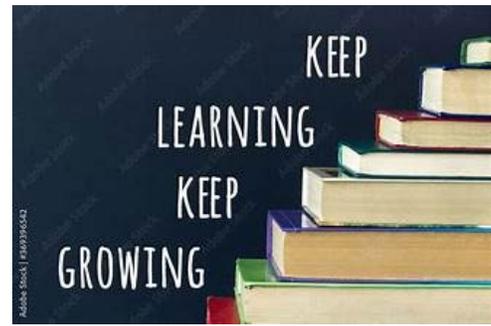
[Register Here:](#)

WORSHIP: The Rev. Twyla Boyer was raised in the Presbyterian church. As a child, she sang in the choir, attended Sunday School, participated in a youth group, and was confirmed. However, it wasn't until she was in her thirties that she felt called to ministry as a vocation. Twyla entered Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in the fall of 2002 and graduated in May of 2005. She has served 8 churches in 3 presbyteries – two as a student, two as Associate Pastor, two as Interim Pastor, and two as a called and installed Pastor.



Pastor Twyla was installed at Penfield Presbyterian Church in May 2020 and is now in what she considers the joyful phase of ministry with a congregation that is creative, loving, welcoming, and open. She is active in the presbytery and passionate about loving our neighbors as ourselves and following the teachings of Jesus in a way that is invitational and non-judgmental. Pastor Twyla is eager to greet you in worship and welcomes your call, text, or email.

11:15 AM Session:



Anti-racism Training: Enacting Our Values:

[Register Here:](#)

Speaker: Savoy Myricks is a proud graduate of Ben Franklin High School and the University of Rochester. After an exciting career as a financial consultant in San Diego, he returned home to focus on making a difference in the community. Today, Savoy partners with nonprofits, churches, and local organizations to drive racial equity and economic growth throughout Rochester. Through his teams at SavyWebsiteBuilding.com and MindCraftMedia.org, he designs websites and produces videos that help local groups share their stories, inspire action, and grow stronger.



Can We Talk?: The Presbyterian Church USA has lost members rapidly over the past twenty years, an era called "The Great Dechurching," when over 40 million worshipers gave up on churches entirely. Yet over the same two decades, over 1,000 small, shoestring congregations also expanded into megachurches. Based on interviews with leading researchers on U.S. religiosity, this workshop will offer insights on what we know appeals to non-worshipers who are likely to attend church, especially the most spiritually underserved Americans - Millennials and Gen Zers. Hopefully, there will be a little time for participants to begin considering how they might adopt some of the rich research available into their own ministries.

[Register Here:](#)

Speaker: Rev Kirk Baker; I grew up in Penn Yan, NY, attended the University of Rochester, and then feeling my world was a little circumscribed, moved to the People's Republic of China from 1988 - 1992. Raised toward Atheism, I became a Christian as a young man and found China a challenging and rich mission field.



Returning home in 1992 with an extremely intelligent, capable spouse I worked for various nonprofits while supporting her education. She then supported me while I went to seminary and beyond. During that time, I worked on staff at and then as solo pastor for nearby churches.

The First Presbyterian Church of Honeoye Falls is my third congregation as a solo pastor and third congregation to reverse decline, grow numerically, and extend new ministries to the community. While there is no "silver bullet" to ward off church decline, I'll share observations that seem to hold true for all of these quite different congregations.

Caring for Our Immigrant Neighbors: This workshop is open to everyone and aims to provide insight into how individuals, families, and churches in central and western New York are addressing the needs of immigrants requiring support. What are some impactful ways to extend our assistance? Join us to hear examples and explore opportunities, and feel free to share your own ideas about what is happening at your church or in your community to support our immigrant neighbors. [Register Here:](#)

Speakers: Rev. Kirianne E. Weaver has been serving at the First Presbyterian Church of Ithaca for 11 years. In that time she co-founded "Ithaca Welcomes Refugees" and led the church in providing startup support for "Open Doors English," Ithaca's only adult English classes open to all. Both organizations are still housed at the church. In January of 2025, she and other organizers with the immigrant community in Ithaca started meeting regularly in the church basement and now call themselves the "Immigrant Solidarity Group," organizing to protect Ithaca's diverse community from current federal attacks. On a personal level she and her children provided sponsorship and a home for a family from Ukraine in 2022, and soon thereafter welcomed a new family from Ecuador. She is glad to be able to share in this conversation.



Rev. Bruce Gillette and Carolyn Winfrey Gillette (his wife and a gifted hymn writer) have been serving as the pastors of the First Presbyterian Union Church in Owego since 2018. They hosted an immigrant fellowship from Ghana for five years when they were in Delaware. They served the most multicultural church (Overbook) in Philadelphia. An Afghan father and his four children have been living above their Owego church office since 2021. They have provided supportive services (rides for food and medical care, housing and clothes) and Spanish-language worship services for Christmas and Easter in the last couple of years. They have helped provide care for a Chinese immigrant in the ICE detention service in Batavia and his family since last summer. Bruce is the co-chair of the joint Justice Committee for Susquehanna Valley and Cayuga-Syracuse Presbyteries and serves on the New York State



Council of Churches' Social Justice Committee. He finished serving as the Moderator for the national Presbyterians for Earth Care in January 2025.



NYIC

Cassandra Bocanegra is the senior manager of organizing and strategy for the Finger Lakes Region of the New York Immigration Coalition. She says, "Since I was born in Texas and had the privilege of being documented I was taught to appreciate that privilege and use it to speak up when I

saw injustices in my community. My family is mixed status and so I have had certain freedoms that others in my community did not including the safety of using my voice." Cass has been an advocate for the immigrant community since 2010. Her wisdom, skills and talent have been used to fight the violent repression of the current administration. We are privileged to have her speak with us.

Stated Clerk Training: Join the Stated Clerk for an hour and a half on the very basics of being a Clerk of Session. Bring your questions, best practices, and tricks of the trade to share with other clerks. If you are a seasoned clerk, you are invited to share case studies with the group to work through together.

Register Here:



Speaker: Rev Bethany Benz-Whittington is the Stated Clerk for the Presbytery of Genesee Valley as well as a nationally known trainer in spiritual leadership through her business, Sacred Calls. She has a long history in her family of being a Presbyterian Nerd and is looking forward to sharing that with you!

Anti-Racism Training:

<https://pbygenval.wufoo.com/forms/cld-2026-antiracism-training/>

Elder Training:

<https://pbygenval.wufoo.com/forms/cld-2026-elder-training/>

Deacon Training:

<https://pbygenval.wufoo.com/forms/cld-2026-deacon-training/>

Grants Training:

<https://pbygenval.wufoo.com/forms/cld-2026-grants-training/>

New Worshipping Communities:

<https://pbygenval.wufoo.com/forms/cld-2026-new-faith-communities-conversation/>

Can We Talk?

<https://pbygenval.wufoo.com/forms/cld-2026-can-we-talk/>

Caring for Our Immigrant Neighbors

<https://pbygenval.wufoo.com/forms/cld-2026-caring-for-our-immigrant-neighbors/>

Stated Clerk Training:

<https://pbygenval.wufoo.com/forms/cld-2026-stated-clerk-training/>