



# EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF THE MEDIATOR

Allentown · Pennsylvania



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The Episcopal Church of the Mediator is a welcoming community of faith, empowered by the Holy Spirit, celebrating and proclaiming God's love as we minister in the parish, in our community, and in the world.

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We believe God's love is unconditional and all-embracing. Through Jesus Christ, we are called to love one another as God loves us, welcoming all people regardless of gender, race, culture, ethnic background, sexual orientation, economic circumstance, family configuration, age, or difference of ability. We celebrate and affirm the worth and dignity of every human person as a beloved child of God.

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## LEHIGH VALLEY

The Lehigh Valley has a population of nearly 675,000 people and is a commercial and cultural center with a history dating back to the early eighteenth century. Because of the diversity of enterprises and institutions that have developed here, the “Valley” is a region of many contrasts. It is also an area blessed with considerable natural beauty, enjoying a temperate climate with warm summers and few subzero winter days.

The region is comprised of two counties: Lehigh to the west and Northampton to the east. Allentown, located in Lehigh County, is the largest and westernmost among the Valley’s three cities, which include Bethlehem and Easton. The Episcopal Church of the Mediator, located in Allentown, is part of the Diocese of Bethlehem which is headquartered near the Cathedral Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.

One of the Valley’s primary assets is its location. Situated near the center of the great megalopolis that stretches from Boston to Washington, the Valley is the first major market to the west of the greater New York City area and thus serves as a strategic link to the regions to the north, south, and west. As Pennsylvania’s third largest metropolitan area the Valley plays a vital role in matters affecting the whole state. Population projections indicate the Valley will grow by ten percent in the coming decade.

Visit [discoverlehighvalley.com](https://discoverlehighvalley.com) to learn more.

## ALLENTOWN

Allentown, with a population of over 121,000, is the seat of Lehigh County. It is the fastest growing major city in Pennsylvania and is located 55 miles north of Philadelphia and 85 miles west of New York City.





The city is an exciting center for artistic and cultural expression. [The Allentown Art Museum](#) has been described as one of the nation's best "small museums". [The Allentown Symphony](#), Municipal Opera Company, [Ballet Guild of the Lehigh Valley](#), [the Community Music School](#), two chamber orchestras and several fine choirs, including [the Bach Choir of Bethlehem](#), provide a wide variety of cultural entertainment. The city sponsors six concert bands, including [the Allentown Band](#), established in 1829.

[The Liberty Bell Shrine](#) commemorates where the original Liberty Bell was hidden during the American Revolution. [The Allentown Library](#), with an annual circulation of over a million books, is one of the largest in the state.

Allentown boasts a park system rated as one of the best in the nation. 2,000 acres of public land have been developed into an impressive park system with 20 parks,

4 parkways, 8 swimming pools, and 2 restricted use, or "passive," parks.

West Park, adjacent to the Church of the Mediator, hosts regular band concerts during the summer. A nearby, nationally award-winning rose garden features over 100 varieties.

Established within the territory of the indigenous Lenni Lenape tribe, Allentown was initially settled by Germans with later waves of immigrants from southern and central Europe, the British Isles, and more recently Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East. Latin Americans make up the fastest growing segment of the population, with a majority of Puerto Rican and Dominican ancestry, followed by Colombians and Ecuadorians. The third largest population of Syrian Americans in the United States live in Allentown, a community dating back 130 years. As of 2020, the total minority population of the city was reported to be 65%, with 52% Hispanic, 10% Black, and 2.5% Asian.





## EDUCATION

Nine public school districts serve Lehigh County. The largest of these is [Allentown](#), the third largest school district in Pennsylvania. In Allentown, as in many cities in America, there is no question that administrators and teachers are facing many challenges educating the district's 16,600 students, hailing from 51 countries and speaking 26 languages, with 89% coming from low income households.

However, it is also recognized that the Allentown schools provide a broad range of excellent educational programs, providing opportunities for students that the smaller districts may not be able to match. There are many parochial and private schools, as well, for primary and secondary education. In Lehigh County as a whole, one third of the total student population attend these non-public schools.

Regionally, there are twelve institutions of higher learning, both public and private, among them [Cedar Crest College](#), [Lafayette College](#), [Lehigh University](#), [Muhlenberg College](#), and [Moravian College](#).

## HEALTHCARE

The Lehigh Valley has a comprehensive healthcare community with two large, competing health systems: [Lehigh Valley Health Network](#) and [St. Luke's University Health Network](#), both of which provide a full range of inpatient, outpatient, and home care services. Lehigh County's mental health, and social service organizations depend on the financial support, outreach, and public health efforts of these two health systems.



## SOCIAL SERVICES

The Lehigh Valley has an array of over 400 social service programs that work to improve quality of life. These agencies range from YM- and YWCAs to Girl and Boy Scouts, visiting nurses, family counseling, and community-based organizations, such as the [Hispanic American Organization](#). Other agencies with more specific programs include the [Arc Of Lehigh & Northampton Counties](#), the [Adult Literacy Center](#), the [Bradbury Sullivan LGBTQ Community Center](#), and countless others. There are programs and shelters for women dealing with domestic abuse and

violence, a Crime Victim's Council, and three active food banks. Within Allentown there are several homeless shelters variously targeting men, women, and families.

## GOVERNMENT

Both the City of Allentown and Lehigh County have home rule governments, both have open decision processes that allow for public participation. The county operates an array of social services for the intellectually disabled, drug and alcohol addicted, and abused and neglected children. Allentown provides for public safety with well-equipped fire and police departments and active neighborhood efforts. Police reform has been an issue of political debate and the Police Department has made progress in community policing efforts and diversification of personnel



## LOCAL ECONOMY

A number of notable manufacturers are located in the Valley, including Air Products and Chemicals, Mack Trucks, B. Braun Medical, and Binney & Smith, (Crayola) & Just Born. The area is also becoming a major

warehousing and distribution center, serving the Eastern Corridor. The largest employers in the Valley, each with over 2000 local employees include, in descending order; Lehigh Valley Hospital, Air Products, Lehigh County, St. Luke's Hospital, and Mack Trucks. A modern airport, Lehigh Valley International, has daily flights to the major eastern airline hubs, and several large industrial parks near the airport provide many job opportunities.



Farming is an important component of the Lehigh Valley economy with over 900 farms which cover 22% of the Lehigh Valley's 726 square miles, producing corn, wheat, soybeans, potatoes, apples, peaches, hay, cattle and turkeys, as well as dairy products.

The entire area has experienced new growth which is expected to continue with a focus on the revitalization of the downtown sections of Allentown, Bethlehem, and Easton. The City of Allentown pioneered a new method of redevelopment known as Neighborhood Improvement Zoning which has been very successful for Center City redevelopment, attracting many financial and human resource companies, like ADP, to the city.





Within the neighborhood, or immediately adjacent to it, are several complexes for housing the elderly. A large public high school, William Allen High, with over 2,750 students is one block west of the church. West Park, with its arboretum and band-shell is immediately east of the church. The Allentown Fairgrounds, two blocks from the church, provides an annual week-long fair as well as regular entertainment events and a weekly farmers market.

## NEIGHBORHOOD

The Church of the Mediator's neighborhood is called the West Park Historic District. It is about one mile from the center city business district of Allentown.

This neighborhood of about 6,000 persons is comprised mainly of large row houses, almost universally three stories high, many of which have been subdivided into multi-family units.









## COMMUNITY ROLE

The Church of the Mediator and its parishioners serve both the local community and the community beyond Allentown.

The majority of parishioners list Allentown and its suburbs as their address, with the remainder living in outlying towns, mostly to the west and within a 15-mile radius of the church. Both individually, and as a parish, the people of the Mediator have a long history of community service. The parish also makes its facilities available to many community organizations.



### Refugee Community Center

The parish developed, sponsors, and conducts the Refugee Community Center at Mediator to support the social adjustment and well being of refugees and asylum seekers and to advocate on behalf of newly arrived and/or socially disadvantaged international populations, providing resources

for community integration and self-sufficiency. Under the previous administration, drastic cuts in the number of refugees prompted a shift in focus from welcoming new refugees to supporting refugees and asylum seekers living in the area in need of language and citizenship classes. During Covid-19 quarantines, the Refugee Center continued to serve this population over Zoom. We are planning a four-week summer ESL classes for adults and children and will host a community ice cream social on the lawn in July, provided the weather and community health conditions are favorable.

### Community Justice Panel

The Community Justice Panel program is a youth aid panel diversion program designed to utilize trained community volunteers to effectively handle first-time offenders charged with summary and misdemeanor offenses.

### West Park Civic Association

An organization dedicated to preserving the character of the neighborhood, holds its meetings and community social events at Mediator and its annual house tour is anchored at the church.

### Girl Scouts

Junior Girl Scout Troop #337 meets at the Mediator.

### Alcoholics Anonymous

For many years, several large AA groups have held their regular meetings on the second floor of the parish house.

## PARISH HISTORY

The Church of the Mediator was founded in 1863 under the auspices of the Diocese of Pennsylvania. It established a Sunday school in Allentown's Sixth Ward and served a large unchurched population of British and Anglican heritage.

The first church building was erected in 1866 at Front & Furnace Streets in Allentown. Completed in 1869, it adopted the name Church of the Mediator after a church in Philadelphia. The church enjoyed a flourishing ministry until declining in the depression of 1873-74. The property was sold in 1911.



Our present property was purchased in 1912 and the Rev. Robert Knott Merriman, who was called as its rector. During his tenure of 36 years there was continual growth. A parish house with worship space was built. The original building is still in use today as offices, library, common area, and gymnasium.



Under the leadership of the Rev. Arthur Sherman, weekly services were begun and membership increased. The present sanctuary was built and dedicated in May 1958. It featured three lancet windows and a large, free-standing, marble altar with a cross etching.

In the 1960s, ministry in the wider community was the touchstone of the next rector, the Rev. David Birney. The Pastoral Institute of the Lehigh Valley and a nursery school were formed, which served the Parish and community for many years. Christian Education was also fully developed at this time.

During the tenure of the Rev. A. Theodore Eastman, in the early 1970s, the initiative of the Associated Parishes began. The ministry enabled Mediator to support St. Elizabeth's and St. Anne's with many opportunities for mutual ministry. Today, St. Anne's is a parish to the west, while St. Elizabeth's flourished for several years it eventually closed.



Also during this time the Parish Prayer Group began meeting and a prayer chain was formed and still operates today. The Cursillo Movement and the Bethel Bible Series also began.

Ecumenical involvement continued under the leadership of the Rev. A. Malcom McMillan in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The highlight of this time was the establishment of the Covenant Parishes which consisted of Mediator, First Presbyterian, St. Thomas More and St. Timothy' Evangelical Lutheran Church. A number of ecumenical initiatives came out of this program.

During the tenure of the Rev. R. Bruce Birdsey, we embarked on a Growth and Renewal Program in 1992 which led to the expansion of both the education and music programs of the parish. It also led to a major renovation and repairs to the building. We continued our outreach and during this time sponsored two Vietnamese families. Congregational fellowship were enhanced with our movie group and the men's breakfast group, both of which continue today.

In 1996 we experienced a devastating fire which affected the sanctuary, Sunday school rooms, and office area. With the support of staff, a legion of volunteers, and our interim cleric, the Very Rev. Dean Schenkle, the church was rededicated in October of 1996.

A strong base of lay involvement in the parish and the community was developed to welcome a new rector.

## THE PAST 20 YEARS

After serving as a supply minister on several occasions during 1998 and 1999, Maria Tjeltveit accepted the call to become the rector of the Church of the Mediator on September 1, 1999.

Over the past twenty years, considerable work was done to strengthen congregational life, including the music program, which had always been of paramount importance in both parish and surrounding community. In 2003, a very talented organist, Clint Miller, was hired to replace our departing choir director, and he and our accomplished choir continue to provide an outstanding music program. Attention was also directed toward increasing lay involvement, deepening spiritual formation through Christian education, and strengthening our pastoral care ministry. New opportunities for fellowship within the parish were formed, among them a book club, dinner groups, a young families group, as well as talent shows and chili suppers.

The reestablishment of our Outreach Commission in 2000 was perhaps an early harbinger of the direction our parish would eventually take. Just for Kids (JFK), a well-



established after school activities program for local middle schoolers continued to provide a vital service in our immediate neighborhood. Thanksgiving in July, the August collection of school supplies, the Giving Tree and Adopt-a-Family programs at Christmas, and our Easter Basket In-gathering were among the ways our members could give back to the community.



In the early 2000s, important improvements were made to the structure, including the installation of an elevator and an outdoor ramp, improving our facility's accessibility.

The parish celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of our sanctuary in 2008 and the 150th Anniversary of the Church of the Mediator in 2013. In recognition of those achievements, the parish kicked off a major fundraising campaign called Widening Our Welcome (WOW). This drive made possible an impressive commercial transformation of our basement kitchen, in which we could legally prepare community dinners and host church-sponsored social events.

Thanks to the WOW campaign, our budget was able to fund a part-time assistant pastor or priest associate, and on August 1, 2014, the

Rev. Twila Smith became our first full-time missionary. In the fall of that year, we began a cooperative relationship with Grace Church in downtown Allentown, and the Rev. Smith divided her time between the two parishes.

In 2015, in response to a gradual decline in the size of our parish, we implemented some minor changes to our organizational system, structure, and operations. Our Vestry, or governing body, was reduced from twelve members to nine, each of whom would act as a liaison to a specific "working group" of parishioners responsible for a particular ministry within the church, for example, Worship, Mission & Evangelism, and Christian Education. At the same time, a decision was made to consolidate the 8am and 10:30am services into a joint 9am service during the summer.



The Refugee Community Center, possibly the most noteworthy outreach effort ever sponsored by the Mediator, opened its doors in September 2016 in the basement of the Parish House. The Rev. Smith served as the director for the ministry, the goal of which is to provide a gathering place for newly arriving families from places such as Syria, Sudan,



Eritrea, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Children receive care and acquire kindergarten readiness skills, while their parents and other adults learn English, seek advice, learn about relevant support services. The center is staffed by volunteers from both inside and outside of Mediator's congregation. Previously unimaginable friendships have been established, life-changing lessons learned, and delicious community dinners are shared as part of this amazing undertaking.

In 2019, the Rev. Tjeltveit announced her plans to retire in June 2020. While she was on sabbatical from April through August, the parish attempted to absorb the shock and plan for our future. Fortunately, when Covid-19 reared its head in March 2020, she postponed her retirement until January 2021.



## CHRISTIAN EDUCATION FOR ALL AGES

### Children & Youth

**Sunday School** — We offer Sunday school at 9am on Sunday mornings and a nursery for newborns to age three from 9am until the end of the 10:15am service. Members of our congregation serve as teachers and assistants. In addition, we have a paid nursery attendant and a paid Director of Children and Youth. We currently have approximately twenty children and youth in the congregation and we strive to offer innovative educational programs for all levels. We also offer confirmation classes.

**Youth Group** — A youth group meets periodically with mentors from the congregation to do activities geared toward growth and development while having fun. We also periodically schedule family fun afternoons of bowling or other activities which are open to all members of the congregation, adults and/or children of all ages.

### Adult Education

Adult forum takes place Sunday mornings at 9am, between the 8am and 10:15am services. It has a faithful group of adults that enjoy series of thought provoking topics to enhance their knowledge and spiritual growth.

Additional adult education studies take place periodically throughout the church seasons. Small groups are formed that meet in living rooms or at the church. Some studies are done with nearby Episcopal churches.

## MEDIATOR & COVID-19

In mid-March 2020, Governor Wolf declared a sweeping shut down of all non-essential businesses and instituted a stay-at-home order for Pennsylvania in response to the Covid-19 outbreak. Mediator followed the guidelines from the Diocese of Bethlehem to suspend all indoor, in-person gatherings.

Mediator at that time broadcast services via Facebook Live. All activities and events were canceled. This was a hard time for some as this progressed through the Easter season and into early summer. Some suburban churches were able to meet outdoors or in parking lots. When healthcare metrics made it safer to gather, we resumed services at 25% capacity. The sanctuary was cleverly marked off with ribbons as health protocols were initiated. Those who wished to attend needed to reserve a spot and wear a mask. Services continued to be broadcast via Facebook. Our capacity was slightly increased for a time. Activities, groups, and events that would meet at the Church building continued to be canceled.

In November 2020, with a surge of new Covid-19 cases, diocesan leadership reinstated the suspension of all indoor gatherings. The Rector made the decision to use Zoom connectivity to broadcast services and allow for more interactive worship. In short order, the parishioners were able to figure out how to assign readings and prayers for attendees to take part in the service. The choir has also increasingly become very innovative in being able to produce and share organ preludes and recessionals, psalms, piano pieces, instrumentals, and hymns —

some done in harmony by the same person! In February, about one month after our rector retired, a supply priest announced that she had never seen such an involved parish in creating and participating in our worship each Sunday.



Electronic church publications have been handled very well and in a timely manner by our Parish Administrator. Since the Rector's departure in January, our Senior Warden has been overseeing the inner workings of the parish, the staff, and the building. The Vestry is working hard to make sure members of Mediator stay connected.

We still remain a vital community. Those who would normally visit the sick, the elderly, and patients in hospitals have been trying hard to keep in contact with these individuals via mail and phone calls. We have figured out how to do collections — monetary and otherwise, and how to participate in virtual events such as Bible study and book clubs.

Mediator will continue to meet on Zoom, continue to conduct meetings, and continue to correspond electronically until such time as we are cleared to visit the Church for worship, events, meetings, functions, and daily up-keep of our building.



## PARISH SURVEY & HOPES FOR THE FUTURE

The Search Committee conducted a 15-minute parish survey in November of 2020 to assess demographics, worship style preferences, and hopes for a new rector.

We received 57 responses, reflecting the majority of the active members. While the majority members of the Parish are white and middle- to upper-middle class, and represent a largely aging population like many mainline Protestant churches in Pennsylvania, it is not a homogeneous congregation. Of our 57 survey respondents, 3 identified as Black/African American or Asian/Asian American and 3 declined to answer. 3 identified as LGBTQ. 20% of respondents were under 55.

The parish is, on the whole, an erudite bunch: over half of respondents had either completed graduate school or had done graduate training and another third had completed college.

Parishioners are a mixture of neighborhood locals and those who commute some distance to attend church: 30% of respondents live in Allentown, 28% live in the suburbs of Allentown, 32% live elsewhere in Lehigh County, and the remainder are drawn from the surrounding counties. Parishioners are dedicated members. 37% respondents have been members for 40 or more years, but the church has also continued to attract parishioners: 26% of respondents have been parishioners for 10 or fewer years. 42% of respondents describe themselves as “cradle Episcopalians,” while the remainder have come to the Episco-

pal church from diverse faiths: Catholic, Moravian, Lutheran, Mennonite, Hindu, Evangelical and other Protestant religions or no religion. 19% are former Catholics and 14% are former Lutherans.

While the Parish has been worshipping at 9am during the summers and recently during the pandemic on Zoom, parishioners typically identify themselves to each other with their traditional service time: “8am-er” and “10:15am-er.” The 8am service typically attracts those who want an early service and feel particular spiritual connection to the Book of Common Prayer or Rite I worship, and those at 10:15am service (with choir and organ) are often more drawn to the music as a meaningful spiritual experience. While congregation overwhelmingly has an appreciation for very traditional or moderately traditional worship (Rite I and Rite II services) and traditional hymnody, over half of respondents said they prefer as their top or second choice in worship style a mixture of traditional and contemporary styles.

There is an abiding tolerance and acceptance of a great latitude of liturgical forms, with the most significant common denominator being



a strong preference for the approved texts of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer and its approved supplements.

A strong majority of respondents rate outreach endeavors like the Refugee Center important or very important and nearly all respondents reported being involved in one or more ministries. 40% of respondents rated their participation in activities outside of worship as “very involved” or “involved.” 66% participate in Adult Forum, 49% attend community dinners, and 81% participate in the Art in the Park/Tossed and Found Sale fundraiser.

The parish appreciates a variety of sermons, but 81% prefer the interpretation of the gospel or lectionary readings from an historical or linguistic perspective, 77% prefer an interpretation of the gospel or lectionary readings from a contemporary perspective, 58% prefer sermons about cultural or social justice issues, and slightly over half prefer sermons about the rector’s experiences and personal narratives. A theme that runs through much of the parish’s identity, while on the surface seemingly self-contradicting, there’s an openness and love of the best that has been thought and said, but also an unflinching willingness to temper those affections and commitments with fresh ideas and in light of current events.

The parish expresses a desire for a compassionate, kind, and faithful leader and strong interpreter of the Gospel to help guide us in worship and in our various ministries in the community.

## FINANCIALS

The Episcopal Church of the Mediator is a financially stable, self-funding parish. Most of our operating income is derived from the annual generosity of our members. Our yearly pledges from parishioners have been steady and even show a slight increase across the board in 2020. We also receive a small percentage as a result of income from bequest investments and from the income of our several endowment funds. We have never used funds from the principal of our endowments and have seen them grow through the years.

In 2013 the church held a Widening Our Welcome (WOW) campaign. Generous contributions from our congregation helped the church finance some building changes. Improvements to the church including the remodeling of the church kitchen, renovation of the library, and the installation of an elevator from the main floor to the lower level of the church building.

We offer an annual salary for a full-time priest compatible with the formula provided by the Diocese of Bethlehem. Mediator does not own a parish house, but instead compensates the priest with a housing allowance that is calculated at 46% of the annual salary paid to the priest. This is paid to the priest regardless of their current housing situation. We have an annual amount to be used for the continuing education of the priest. Another benefit is a church paid health insurance plan used by the Diocese of Bethlehem. We also include the priest’s spouse or partner, along with any children, in the health insurance plan.



