

# 2023 SPC ANNUAL MEETING of the CONGREGATION

Sunday, December 10, 2023, 10 a.m.

## Report of the Nominating Committee

### Ruling Elder Nominees

#### *Class of 2027*

(three year term, renewable,  
except for \*continuing members):

*John Gonano, \*Mary Anne Hitt,  
Stephanie Jamieson, Wanda Stewart*

### Deacon Nominees

#### *Class of 2025*

(one year term,  
renewable for a three year term):

*Susan Lovell*

#### *Class of 2026*

(two year term,  
renewable for a three year term):

*Donna Dettling, Eileen Espinoza,  
Jennifer Espinoza*

#### *Class of 2027*

(three year term, renewable,  
except for \*continuing members):

*\*Jennifer Jones, \*Patti McCarthy, \*Derek  
Smith, Sherry Sykes,  
Diana Wesley*

### Nominating Committee

#### *Class of 2027*

(three year term, non-renewable):

*Leslie Williams*

### Trustees

*Class of 2027 Mary Bell*

*Class of 2026 Jim Crawford*

*Class of 2025 Suellen Myers*

(all renewable for a three year term)

### NOMINEES BACKGROUND:

We asked our slate of nominees these questions:

1. When (approximately) did you first attend a service at SPC? Who or what prompted you? What was your first impression?
2. Previous church(es), if any.
3. Considering that many people in America don't, why do you participate in the life of a church?
4. One thing SPC does well.
5. One thing SPC should do, or could do, better.
6. Anything about you or your family you'd like the congregation to know.

### RULING ELDER

#### JOHN GONANO

1. 2006 regularly, occasionally since 2002. Natasha and I were dating. She had been attending SPC since childhood. I had been attending St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Martinsburg. I have a distinct memory of wondering where the Churches were during the build up to the Iraq War. Why were they so silent? Then I came to a service at SPC and Randy stated clearly from the pulpit, *This march to war must stop!* I was also made to feel very welcome and issues like outreach to migrant workers was embraced.
2. Primarily Lutheran Churches growing up. St Joseph Catholic Church as an adult.
3. My family attended church regularly so that gave me a framework. As an adult I need to connection to a community of believers. I also want my son, William, to have that same opportunity that I had growing up.
4. Openness to new ideas, independent thinking, creativeness.

5. Flip side of the strength. Neglects a biblical foundation and lacks openness to more "conservative" churches. This leads to a sort of "liberal" fundamentalism.

6. We believe that the work of the church is vital to our lives and the lives of others.

Specifically, we pray for a more diverse church body with engaged youth.

#### **\*MARY ANNE HITT**

1. 2010. I was looking for a spiritual community that shared my values and was a place to be of service. We were also interested in raising our daughter in the Presbyterian Church – my mother-in-law is a retired Presbyterian minister. SPC was welcoming and open minded, and full of talented people.

2. None

3. It provides me with a spiritual home, and a place to be more connected to my community.

4. I'm grateful for SPC's commitment to social justice and addressing climate change.

5. I appreciate the volunteers who help teach Sunday Studio every week, and we can always use more of them!

6. We love the music and all the talented musicians at SPC. Thank you for sharing your talents with us every week, and allowing us to share ours on occasion!

#### **STEPHANIE JAMIESON**

1. I first attended SPC when we retired and moved to Sharpsburg in 2009. My first impression was that SPC was a warm and welcoming community.

2. I grew up in Ironia Presbyterian Church in Ironia, NJ. As an adult I belonged to Presbyterian churches in Troy, Michigan; El Paso, Texas; Bellevue, Nebraska; Colorado Springs, Colorado; and Crofton, Maryland.

3. I grew up knowing that church was important. Both of my parents were involved in our church.

4. SPC reaches out to the community and is involved in local community services such as JCCM and the community meals.

5. Always room for more outreach.

6. Married to Perry for 52 years.

#### **WANDA STEWART**

1. I first came to SPC in 1999 after the invitation from Dena Hill, a longtime friend. I was immediately met with a warm welcome and felt the peace of God in this place.

2. St. Luke Baptist Church in Berryville, VA

3. I feel the need to worship and share fellowship with others to improve my relationship with God. I know I can't live effectively any other way.

4. SPC is very good at making visitors feel welcome.

5. SPC to my knowledge, doesn't do anything poorly.

6. My family is, and always has been, God-fearing and put our faith in the Word of God.

#### **DEACON**

#### **DONNA DETTLING**

1. Christmas Eve 2019. We had just moved to Shepherdstown and wanted to check out our local Presbyterian church and enjoy the special service. We loved the warmth of the church and congregation and were very impressed by the service. We felt you had a natural, comforting, down-to-earth presence.

2. New Hope Presbyterian in Derwood, MD (both of us), Warner Memorial Presbyterian in Kensington, MD (me).

3. I am a lifelong Presbyterian and church-goer (and an ordained elder). I like being part of a family of faith, knowing these people are on a similar path and I can reach out for friendship, help, comfort. I feel it's important to be part of a community organization that supports assorted needs within the group and in the surrounding area.

4. All aspects of the worship service.

5. I have felt a little lost trying to get to know who is who, and details of what's going on in the church. It would be nice to have a new member group or a shepherd for new members.

6. I am recently retired and exploring things of interest to determine how/where I'd like to spend my new free time! Brian and I each have 2 adult children and between us 7 grandchildren. We moved to Shepherdstown 4 years ago just ahead of Covid, and feel like we are finally getting plugged into local activities and options. We are happy to be members of SPC!

### **EILEEN ESPINOZA**

1. I attended for the first time in 2010/2011 or so with Skylar Benedict's family (Georgia and Bill who attend online now). I sat in the balcony and felt so at home watching Randy Tremba preach. I immediately loved the sampling/supplement of multiple faith traditions and the global perspective for this small town. While I never attended regularly, I visited SPC several times a year from 2013-2016. My grandfather, David Ruhala, who was not a member but who was often a family guest with myself to Skylar's family, had his Celebration of Life at this church in the spring of 2015. That meant a great deal to me that Randy Tremba would officiate this event, even though we were only community members, as Christians without a church. Because of this experience, it was very fulfilling to me to have Jennifer's and my service for Rosalia at SPC.

2. For much of my life, I have had such an ache in my heart for a spiritual community that felt like "home," that accepted me and also embraced ritual and tradition. I'm drawn to the mystical elements of my family's Orthodoxy and the progressive-thinking of More Light Presbyterians. I have gleaned this from many years of attending both Protestant and Catholic services around the US. It hasn't been until this year that I felt drawn to truly belong to a church and community. My family and friends have been my connection to churches. As eastern

European immigrants, my family used to be practicing Byzantine Orthodox, but my generation (my brothers and I) were raised in an ambiguously Christian way. We had a lot of traditional Orthodox icons and religious art in our home, but did not participate in any of the traditions. My mother was raised more strictly Orthodox, with fasting days and multi-day celebrations for Easter and all-night vigils. I craved these ecstatic experiences, though I did not have the language for this desire. My parents (who are divorced and remarried) did not take us to church, besides for our baptism, but rather encouraged us to go with friends or other family members to their churches.

Through these myriad experiences, I sampled a lot of different traditions within Catholicism and Protestantism. SPC is the first church I have ever belonged to! Brief background of church-going experiences: My parents and grandparents belonged to [St Nicholas](#) (Byzantine Orthodox) in Washington, D.C. before I was born. As a child and teen, I was an infrequent visitor of several churches in Virginia, West Virginia, California, and Michigan, including [St Stephen's Episcopal Church](#) (where I was baptized at age 9), [First Presbyterian Church](#) in Flint, Michigan (my mother and grandfather's hometown church, and where my great uncle is interred), and St Theresa's Catholic Church in Palm Springs, CA (where other aunts and uncles are members). My father's sister, Susan, is married to a Baptist pastor who serves in upstate New York. As a child visiting my cousins during the summer, I would attend Baptist sermons. I found this church experience to be dogmatic and uninviting. As a youth and teen, my neighbors attended an Assembly of God church in Tomahawk, WV, and I went a dozen times or so. I found this church to be ruthlessly evangelical and I did not attend after middle school. In high school, I occasionally attended Pentecostal services in Martinsburg with my best friend, whose family is very evangelical. I

did not remotely enjoy the message or zeal of this church, though the drama of the sermons (including tent revivals and snake handling!) was definitely moving. Towards the end of my high school experience, my close friend Skylar Benedict offered to bring me to his family's church here in Shepherdstown, which happened to be SPC! SPC became the church I attended for holidays and when I was back home visiting. I felt such a connection to the space and the community, as well as the progressive message of the More Light movement.

Attending SPC with Skylar sparked my interest in joining a church community. While in graduate school, I attended mass several times a year with extended family at St Theresa's Catholic Church in Palm Springs, California. While I enjoyed the solemnity of service, the message felt hollow and I did not connect to mass. When I visited Shepherdstown during those years, I attended Christmas Eve services at St Peter's Lutheran. When Jennifer and I moved to Shepherdstown in 2022, I told her about my experiences attending SPC with Skylar and my grandfather, and we decided to attend our first services together in January 2023.

3. I have desired this kind of community for my whole life. I think that people are the hands of God, and I think that the only way (for me) to truly live God's (whoever that may be to anyone!) word is through action — faith, to me, is demonstrated by action. I am drawn to service and community care, very much so, and being a part of SPC feeds my soul's desire to help.

4. What drew me most to SPC then and now is the inclusion of children in the sermon and church life. First Pew is what caught my heart the most — I had never seen this approach before. 10 years later, I'm so happy to teach Sunday school here! I also absolutely love that SPC embraces other faith traditions as sources for inspiration and worship. I particularly

admire all of the poetry selections and music programming.

5. I think SPC is doing so great at community outreach. I want to learn more about the queer and trans activism of the church and join the youth in that; this is something that very much drew me to SPC. I also would like to learn more about our community outreach and what we have planned for the new year. I love the work of Shepherdstown Shares — I wonder if SPC might make a connection with them if we don't already. We could also create our own food pantry or Free Shop to serve our congregants and town. I know that our congregation seems pretty middle-class, but I would like to help reach those in need in our church or beyond. Coming from a very rural and blue collar background, issues of hunger and food security is super important to me. That said, I definitely want to get involved in the community meals that we do offer!!

6. We are so excited to continue our journey at SPC and so thrilled to have found a home here!

### **JENNIFER ESPINOZA**

1. I first attended service a few months after moving to Shepherdstown. I came here with my wife Eileen, who grew up in the area and went to school at Shepherd. She had attended SPC on occasion in the past, and had shared with me that she thought it was a special place. I grew up in a pretty repressive fundamentalist evangelical church, and after many years of processing that, I realized my deep and true faith in Christ was completely separate from the institutions that had harmed me. I was interested in finding and attending a church and working on my relationship with God in a serious way. I craved the experience of being part of a church that would see me for who I was and not reject me for being trans. Fortunately, SPC was that church! From the first time I attended in April of 2023, it was very clear that SPC takes its beliefs seriously, and there was such a strong sense of dedicated energy when it came to

speaking out about issues facing marginalized groups, as well as material action being taken to support others in the way Christ wants us to. I found in SPC a true reflection of my understanding of scripture and of our responsibilities as followers of Christ. After meeting with Pastor Gusti during our first attendance, my wife and I instantly decided we wanted to join the church.

2. The churches I went to growing up were affiliated with Calvary Chapel and Harvest fellowships. As mentioned above, I did not return to any church until attending SPC.

3. My faith is the most important thing to me in my life, and while I've had a long spiritual journey in coming to understanding my relationship with God, I find myself craving more communal experiences of Christ's love as well as continuous guidance and wisdom, deeper study of scripture, and to seek opportunities to practice my faith and put it into action. Service is also very important to me as someone who teaches Sunday school classes at SPC; instilling a love-centered vision of Christian life within young people is something extremely close to my heart.

4. Welcoming new people (especially those from marginalized communities) into the fold, and giving us opportunities to contribute and be of service in a real way.

5. Nothing I can think of! SPC stands as an example for other churches to look to and learn from, in my opinion.

6. SPC has given so much to Eileen and I in the short time we've been attending, and we are just excited for any opportunity to give back!

#### **\*JENNIFER JONES**

1. I've attended SPC throughout the years since the 1980s. I attended the 2020 Christmas Eve service where I met Gusti and decided to attend on line during COVID. I joined the church in 2022.

2. Otterbein UM is my childhood church that I attended throughout my life while visiting my

hometown of Huntington WV. I attend for spiritual nourishment provided through our music, community, Pastor Gusti's sermons and the overall support that I feel from our special church and our amazing members.

3. SPC does community very well. Also, our services are designed/planned to flow and to pull together and complement the scripture lesson. The readings, music and message are all aligned and that creates great cohesion.

4. I really don't know what we could do better.

5. My extended family and I have been in Shepherdstown (for me, off and on) since the 1970s. I attended Shepherd College. I love this town and I chose to retire here over every other place in the country. I've lived in 8 states and am grateful to have been back in Shepherdstown for the past 22 years.

#### **SUSAN LOVELL**

1 & 2. My husband, Randall, and I started attending SPC in the summer of 2019. We arrived at SPC while visiting various churches after having been life-long United Methodists (most recently as a part of the Otterbein United Methodist Church in Martinsburg). As parents of four children, including a gay son, SPC being part of "More Light Presbyterians" was appealing to us. We realized SPC's sign "We Choose Welcome" is not just a decoration but the genuine representation of the attitude we felt right away. Once we visited SPC, our search was over.

3. We have also always appreciated being part of a church family to give and get support from others in our faith journey and to share life experiences from people with similar values. It is also important for us to be a part of the life of a church congregation and to have the opportunity to regularly re-charge our relationship with the Lord through worship.

4. One of the things SPC does well is addressing tough issues with an open opportunity to discuss opinions in a safe space. The discussions may sometimes challenge our

comfort zones, but help us to more clearly identify our understandings and sometimes make us aware of alternate viewpoints. We are also very pleased with the SPC response to the pandemic challenges. We were thrilled to be able to worship remotely and this worship style has helped us get to know others in the second service that we might not have gotten to know with our previous in-person experience. We spend a lot of time in Oklahoma visiting family and so are pleased to be able to continue to worship remotely and stay connected to our church family when away from home.

5. Because we've been so pleased with our SPC experience, it is more difficult to identify things that SPC could do better. I think perhaps having recently "shopped around" at other churches, I am aware of some marketing tools that SPC doesn't seem to use. Often when visiting another church for the first time, we were offered a packet of information that included key programs of the church and often received a personal follow-up by way of post card, note card or email inviting us back. When visiting SPC, we were given an invitation to introduce ourselves as first time visitors during worship (which we did); but, there wasn't any follow-up related to that introduction.

6. My husband has Early Onset-Alzheimer's.

**\*MICA MARTIN**

1. I came to SPC for the first time to attend an event with a Celtic singer and composer about 10 years ago. It intrigued me that a church would this event, so I came back to a Sunday service and liked what I heard. Nan and Marty Broadhurst were attending SPC and spoke highly about the open-minded spirituality and that also interested me. I met them when I started attending a Buddhist Meditation group that they hosted in their home.
2. I had previously attended a Unitarian Universalist church, Church of Christ, Presbyterian and Southern Baptist.

3. I participate in the life of the church because I believe in its statement to be a welcoming and inclusive congregation.
4. I believe that SPC does an amazing job that taking care of its members. In the love, acceptance, cards, emails, visits, meals and phone calls, loving members extend their compassion and support for other members going through difficulties in their lives.
5. I think we need to be even more aware of visitors to our services and do our best to greet them and help them feel welcomed.
6. I would like the congregation to know that my family is so grateful for the many ways so many people supported, prayed for, sang to and showed us great compassion during my mother's final days. My brothers, their wives, my sons, and my daughter were deeply moved by your loving and continued support.

**\*PATTI McCARTHY**

1. I first attended SPC online approximately September of 2021. I started looking for a new church a couple of years after leaving my previous one. My first impression was that the service was not what I was used to (in a good way). I grew up in the Presbyterian Church and the services were very traditional. A lot of creeds and familiar prayers.
2. My most recent church was Otterbein United Methodist Church in Hagerstown.
3. I participate because it's always been a part of my life. I miss church when I'm not attending and participating.
4. I think SPC does a remarkable job of inviting any and all persons to this truly loving and caring church.
5. Nothing comes to mind.
6. I was a music Ed major in college and after 4 years of school I realized that although I loved music I didn't want to teach. So I went back to school and pursued a degree in accounting which became my career. In my spare time,

aside from my animals, I dabble in stained glass.

### **\*DEREK SMITH**

1. February 2020, just before the shutdown. I had been looking for a new church, and several members of my yoga class (who attend SPC) told me about the philosophy, which fit what I was looking for. As soon as I saw the rainbow flag, I felt at home. And then I saw that there was also a rainbow flag on a plaque – something *permanent* – and I felt even better, more at ease. I loved the service and kept coming back (online after the shutdown).
2. My original membership was at St. Paul's United Methodist Church in Kensington, MD, but I stopped going for a long time. Then I tried "360," an independent church. I got to learn about fundamentalism!
3. I personally need to be with like-minded people and to worship in a community. I had been "going it alone" for too long, and I knew there was something missing.
4. It doesn't seem to matter what the service is about, Pastor Gusti always lets us know that God loves us *no matter what*. It's almost as if we might actually start to believe it if we hear it enough!
5. I would really like to hear some more contemporary Christian music, not to replace what we currently have, but just to add in a little bit. It would also really help me to have the words to the songs broadcast onto a screen.
6. I am so grateful to find a church that I had always hoped I would find within Christianity.

### **SHERRY SYKES**

1. June 2010 my family and I attended SPC for the first time. I had attended the funeral of Michelle Baluch at SPC, she was the beloved Children's Librarian at the Shepherdstown Library. We loved the music ministry here at SPC, so many talented musicians. We have seen SPC go through the transition of Pastors Randy Tremba, Ethel Hornbeck, Bill Sitterly,

and now Pastor Gusti began her term of call in the fall of 2019.

2. Salem United Methodist Church in Keedysville, from 2005-2010. I was raised in a Presbyterian Church as a child growing up in the Niagara Falls suburbs in New York.
3. I feel a sense of community at SPC, as I go through life and walk with God, I need a constant reminder of my blessings and grounding in Jesus' teachings. I am grateful for the community of SPC, especially to the strong female mentors and leaders in our church.
4. One thing SPC does well: Missions, I feel SPC does a great deal for the Shepherdstown community, and Jefferson County. We are a welcoming church!
5. Bring back the Christmas dinner and congregational holiday gathering. Either at the War Memorial Building or the FireHall.
6. My favorite hymn is "Here I am, Lord." We live in Rohrsersville, MD, but we travel over the bridge to Shepherdstown because we love the community here.

### **DIANA WESLEY**

1. I attended SPC about 30 years ago but dropped away when family (3) members required attentive caregiving. I returned one week before the pandemic closed the church. I then became an on-line zoom member, which has worked very well for me and my husband due to health issues. I would have been so thankful if online services had been available for my family, who were devoted Presbyterian church members in Sarasota FL. My Mom was a Deacon and chaired numerous committees and was very involved in volunteer services. On-line services are awesome! I know the value of participating as a church member and was very pleased to be returning to church again. It would always have been a Presbyterian Church for me. I loved the progressive thinking of the church. I loved the beautiful architecture and history of the church.

I loved the kindness of the members who welcomed me. I loved Randy Tremba's sermon.

I loved that it was close to home. 😊

2. I attended: Tabler Station Presbyterian Church (childhood church), Charles Town Presbyterian Church (early adult), Bee Ridge Presbyterian Church (Sarasota FL)

3. There is such a "communal family" spirit in church attendance for me. I love the spirituality and the human factors of church attendance. I love the learning that happens when listening to the sermons, the readings, and singing. I love seeing the little children being loved and taught so beautifully. I feel all of the above, even when attending on-line church. But I love in-person attendance. I am just not sure when that would change for me due to Bill's health issues.

4. The safe, open-minded, welcoming mission of the church is wonderful.

5. I wish there was some way the on-line folks could participate in the service a little bit more. Maybe you could ask us a question, have us respond by e-mail by a certain date and have it added into the bulletin with our photo on top of the response. And the question could be a "get to know you" thing. Do you have a pet, for example? Or a "spiritual thought" of some type.

6. I have been attending a Presbyterian Church since I was 2 years old. I am looking forward with delight following in my Mother's footsteps of 20 years of dedicated service as a Deacon in the Sarasota Bee Ridge Presbyterian Church. I am honored to be offered this opportunity to serve the family of the Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church.

## **NOMINATING COMMITTEE**

### **\*LESLIE WILLIAMS**

1. 2003. A family member was in crisis. It felt like more than I could hold, and I needed to not be alone, if only for an hour. I had the sense that this was a place where others had brought their pain, and where I could bring mine.

2. None.

3. My mind and heart keep growing, learning and stretching here.

4. We really show up for people when we know they need support. And (sorry, I have to name two things) we have taken risks to live in the way and spirit of Jesus.

5. I think we could be more intentional about the way we bring new people into the life of the church.

## **TRUSTEE**

### **MARY BELL**

1. 2006

2. Baptized Catholic, Presbyterian age 7 through 13, Quaker in college, back to Presbyterian in about 1995.

3. My father was a joiner in community activities and active in the Presbyterian Church. I attribute my participation to him.

4. SPC embraces the community and is embraced by the community. That's radical hospitality.

5. Engage a new generation of people as active participants

*Note: Jim Crawford and Suellen Myers were not asked to submit background information because they were formerly elected as Trustees for Indefinite Terms of service.*

## **NOMINATING COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Session Representative

Carolee Youngblood, Chair

Session Representative Keri Mahoney

At-Large Member Frances Marshall

At-Large Member Rie Wilson

At-Large Member Leslie Williams