



# THE MESSENGER

December 2024

Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church  
Shepherdstownpresbyterian.org

## PASTOR'S NOTE: HOW DO WE "HOLD ON TO HOPE"?

Dear friends,

We hold hope and despair,  
one in each arm, and we  
cradle them close to our chest,  
because they both have something  
important to say at every moment.

So writes Kaitlin Curtice, indigenous author and poet, in *Glory Happening: Finding the Divine in Everyday Places*.

As we enter the Season of Advent this year, many of us at SPC find ourselves vacillating between these polarities. For some of us the promise of hope feels vital, essential, a clarion call to guide us through the deepening darkness and into the promise of God With Us made real at Christmas. For others, despair feels more honest, also essential, insisting we face reality with honesty and integrity.

Our worship and spiritual life through the Season of Advent will follow the lead of Kaitlin Curtice: holding hope and despair equally, listening to what they have to say to us intently, cradling both close to our chest, just as God's cradles each one of us with a compassionate, comforting heart.

Many of our beloved traditions at SPC continue this Season: Advent wreaths and Angels; Weekly Communion and Christmas Caroling; Poinsettias and "Prepare Ye The Way." In addition, the St. Agnes Catholic Community has invited us to participate in a "Las Posadas" nativity procession on Friday, December 20 (more information to come).

One important change to Christmas Eve includes suspending our 5 p.m. Family Service in order to experiment with Children's choral opportunities in the 8pm service. This experiment will shift our 8 p.m. service from a "Lessons and Carols" theme to a more integrated worship that will include child-friendly elements. Please hold all worship leaders in prayerful grace as we celebrate "Hope With Us" in new and invigorating ways.

Holding Hope and Despair With You,

***Pastor Gusti***

**Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church: An Inclusive Spiritual Community.** We welcome all who long for meaning, hope, and belonging. Our faith & practice are rooted in the way of Jesus and enriched by wisdom from all sources. We are committed to being and becoming people of radical compassion, working for justice and wholeness in ourselves and in the world.

The "core commitments" that guide us, and the underlying beliefs that support them are:

**Radical Hospitality: We Choose Welcome**

- Everyone and everything, and every part of ourselves, is included in the circle of God's love.
- Imperfections and suffering are integral to the spiritual path.

**Holistic Spirituality: Everything Belongs**

- The Way of Jesus is a path of transformation.
- Doubt and questions are essential to faith.
- We are connected in Love with all, including those who have gone before us, and all those yet to come.
- We value all sources of Wisdom.

**Engaged Compassion: God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God**

- The Way of Jesus is a way of being in this world, loving, serving and making things whole.
- Loving God means loving all of creation.

**Church Staff**

Rev. Gusti Linnea Newquist (she/her), Pastor

Christa Mastrangelo Joyce (she/her), Director of Children and Youth Formation

Sheila Melendez, Choir Director

Sam Jannotta (he/him), Accompanist

Mark Nutwell (he/him), Tech Support (Contract)

Olivia Gill (she/her), Nursery Lead

Lynn Dampman (she/her), Administrative Assistant

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Contacting Pastor Gusti: Pastor Gusti makes every effort to respond to communications as soon as possible between the hours of 9am and 9pm Saturday through Thursday. Fridays are her Sabbath. If you are having a pastoral emergency, please call any time, day or night. 681-283-5314;

[gusti@shepherdstownpresbyterian.org](mailto:gusti@shepherdstownpresbyterian.org)

## DECEMBER WORSHIP AT SPC

### “Holding On to Hope”

What if we did not know the story?  
What if the unfolding darkness  
clouded our memory of light?  
What if this longing to hold the world in arms of love  
seemed impossible to fulfill?

How would we hold on to hope?

#### **Sunday, December 1**

##### **First Sunday of Advent**

Agape Meal

*Advent Animal: Painted Turtle*

**Guest Preacher Christa Mastrangelo Joyce**

Jeremiah 33:15-16

*I will cause a righteous branch to spring up*

#### **Sunday, December 8**

##### **Second Sunday of Advent**

Communion/Memorial Moment

*Advent Animal: Cottontail*

**Discerning What Is Best**

Philippians 1:3-11

*This is my prayer:*

*that your love may overflow more and more  
with knowledge and full insight  
to help you determine what is best.*

#### **Sunday, December 15**

##### **Third Sunday of Advent**

Communion

*Advent Animal: Garter Snake*

**Water From the Well**

Isaiah 12:2-6

*With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation*

#### **Sunday, December 22**

##### **Fourth Sunday of Advent**

Communion

*Advent Animal: Red Fox*

*Prepare the Way!*

**The People’s Magnificat**

Luke 1:46-55

*God has brought down the powerful from their thrones*

#### **Tuesday, December 24 - Christmas Eve**

8:00 p.m. Service with Family-Friendly Elements

11:00 p.m. Candlelight Communion Service

#### **Sunday, December 29**

##### **First Sunday After Christmas**

**Wisdom and Favor**

Luke 2:41-52



## **CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

**by Christa Mastrangelo Joyce**  
**Director of Children and Youth Formation**

"Do not fear" is offered over and over in Scripture from prophets and angels. Perhaps it is a suggestion, a hope, or an appeal from God. Ridding oneself from fear, however, is impossible. It's hardwired into us to have a response to what is startling, threatening, or disturbing. Perhaps, though, we might look to these stories of angels and prophets and see God's faithfulness as we support one another in decreasing our fear so that it doesn't paralyze us. Along with our faith, we are using this theme to learn practical and faithful strategies to help us deal with those things that overwhelm and intimidate us. This is the work we're moving into now as we journey toward and into Advent.

Our children and youth will have an opportunity through the coming weeks to consider Psalm 34, ways that they can help one another and be community to each other, times when they've felt brave, and ways they can extend care to those who are most vulnerable in the community. Some family conversation starters around this topic might be: What are some times, places, and situations in which you feel afraid and how can our family support one another when we feel afraid? What is your earliest memory of being afraid and are you still afraid of that same thing? How does our fear change as we grow older? What is something you have always been curious about or a place you have always wanted to go but have not because there is something a little bit scary about it? What situations and with what people do you feel safe? What does it take for you to feel safe and secure?

In addition, the youth group spent Sunday, November 17, at the Glenwood Life Recovery Center in Baltimore, MD, in the recovery garden, continuing to maintain our relationship with this special community. We were able to witness the ways that our hands and hearts have impacted the garden work there and to continue to offer our efforts to the beautiful ways they have resurrected this land for the local community. Now we are looking toward December 1, the first Sunday of Advent, when we will lead our Sunday services.



## NOVEMBER SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

- Stewardship Campaign: This year's Focus on the Future stewardship campaign is underway aiming for a pledge income goal of \$280,000 to support budget priorities. We are about a third of the way to the goal. So now is the time to pledge generously.
- Guns to Gardens: Leslie Williams reported on the Guns to Garden event held on 12 October 2024 at the Shepherdstown Fire Hall. The event was successful. Our congregation supported the event through funding for tools and gift cards. Twenty-five volunteers ensured a smooth operation. Sheriff reserve deputies participated. Forty guns were dismantled.
- Matthew 25 Initiative: Anne Teresa provided an update on Matthew 25 activities. Rev. Rebecca Barnes, Coordinator of the Presbyterian Hunger Program, is set to facilitate a community workshop on Saturday, November 16, bringing together those working on hunger and poverty in our area to seek opportunities to alleviate food insecurity beyond food pantries. Planning is underway to hold several Sunday seminars in January focused on local water issues.
- Adult Education: Three representatives from the Poor People's Campaign of West Virginia including Debbie Romano, delivered an inspirational message of resilience and hope at a recent adult education Sunday seminar.
- Social Justice: The Immigrant and Refugee Support Committee will be putting together Christmas gifts for at least two or more immigrant families with young children who need support. There will be an invitation on SPC's Facebook and in the E-news for anyone in the congregation to purchase and contribute a gift. Contact team leader Siri McDonald for more information.
- Youth Education: The youth will paint a mural on the wall of the downstairs activity room with the help of art teacher, Amanda Groff.
- Deacons: The Deacon handout was printed with copies available in the Narthex, Fellowship Hall and in the welcome bags. The Deacons continue their practice of prayer, led by Pastor Gusti, as they live into their devotion to the ministry of compassion, witness, and service.
- Worship: The worship committee is grateful for the many volunteers supporting the regular and special services. The session approved an agape meal on December 1 in place of communion.
- Christmas Eve Services: After much discussion and with the support of SPC families, the session approved eliminating the 5 p.m. Christmas Eve service and combining the "Friendly Beast" portion of that service into the 8 p.m. service.
- Guest Preachers: Rev. Rebecca Barnes (November 17), Rev. Harry Daniel (November 24), and Christa Mastrangelo Joyce (December 1)

*The SPC Session meets the 2nd Thursday of the month, 7pm, in the Fellowship Hall and via Zoom. Meetings are open to any member of the congregation who wishes to attend. Contact Dave Smith, Clerk of Session, to learn more.*

## ADULT EDUCATION SUNDAY SEMINAR HIGHLIGHTS

By Larry Neumark

This fall the Sunday Seminars series was entitled, "Understanding Poverty: Myths, Misunderstandings, and Facing Our Moral Imperative." Throughout the 10-week class, presenters spoke on various topics relating to poverty. One of the highlights of the course included a panel discussion by three persons who are involved with the West Virginia Poor People's Campaign. Our friend Debbie Romano spoke briefly on her involvement with the PPC and then introduced three panelists who spoke eloquently and passionately about the activities, mission, and needs of the PPC. Thirty-five participants listened, asked questions, and became more educated and informed. A second highlight was a presentation by Rev. Rebecca Barnes, Coordinator of the Presbyterian Hunger Program (PCUSA), who shared information about the work our denomination is doing. Much knowledge was gained throughout these 10 weeks and we will be sharing a fact or two about poverty in the next several newsletters to increase your awareness. Our first facts are these (as stated by the panelists):

- The national minimum wage of \$7.25 has not been changed in 15 years. The panelists cited this issue as the one that needs immediate attention and change.
- Another panelist mentioned "scarcity as a myth," saying "This wealthy country has the means to make changes, but lacks the political will."



### COMMUNITY MEAL—ANOTHER REASON TO JOIN US

by Lee Doty, Community Meal Coordinator

There are many reasons to support Community Meal once a month—I seem to find one every Sunday we serve. On one of my first Sundays as SPC's community meal coordinator, we had a young family join the long line of hungry guests. Unlike many of our guests, who take their food with them in take-away boxes and leave once served, the family staked out a table in the large activity room and stayed put. They seemed no different from my own family back when my kids were young, back when we could keep them seated at the table long enough for a meal.

As the servers cleaned up in the kitchen, I brought a round of leftovers to the family's table to see if they'd like to take some extra when they left. The mother spoke for them. "Thanks so much but you know we live in our car and there's not enough room for more food."

**They are just like my family, only they didn't have a home.**

Any amount you can contribute, either purchased or homemade, helps us make hard lives a bit easier. Please log on to: [www.perfectpotluck.com](http://www.perfectpotluck.com), coordinator name is Doty and PW is 4555. Or, consider serving—I can guarantee you will not be sorry you did.

## FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP

### BUDGET AT A GLANCE THROUGH October 31, 2024

#### Actual (10 months)

\$270,337 Total Income (Pledges, Additional Giving, Special Offerings)

\$331,587 Total Expenses (Pastor, Personnel, Property, Mission, Administration, Worship, Social Justice, Education, Special Offerings)

-\$61,250 NET INCOME\*

#### Budgeted (annual)

\$331,030 Total Income

\$369,104 Total Expenses

-\$ 38,074 NET INCOME\*

**Unrestricted Reserves** \$204,037

#### BUDGET NOTES

\*With an increase in pledges for 2024 and the stability of SPC reserves, the Session voted to maintain current strategic investments in mission and advocacy, ministry and children and youth, and online worship capacity.

#### GIVING

The congregation has been asked to increase pledged giving for the next 5 years by 5%. There are many ways to satisfy your pledges, special offerings and individual contributions for a project or program dear to you:

- By check: Made out to SPC, PO Box 268, Shepherdstown, WV 25443
- Online: [www.shepherdstownpresbyterian.org](http://www.shepherdstownpresbyterian.org), use the GIVE icon on the home page. You may use PayPal or a credit card
- In Church: In the offering plate on Sundays

## *How Are We Doing?*

The Communications Team took over production of The Messenger in September 2024, after Pastor Gusti had created it for the first year. We want to know what you think. Do you read it? What do you like? What don't you like? What would you like to see more of? Please look for a brief survey in the December E-News. We look forward to hearing your thoughts.

## DEACON TEAM UPDATE

by Jen Jones, Deacon Moderator

The Deacons held our last official business meeting of the year on November 16. This meeting focused on continued prayer development with Pastor Gusti and a look back at our blessings and gifts from 2024.

Looking forward to 2025, we plan to orient and include five new Deacon Shepherds! We also say “welcome back” to three deacons who took time off during 2024: Derek Smith, Diana Wesley, and Jeananne Stine. We are grateful for those members who stepped up to serve as Deacon Shepherds and those returning to service. *Thank you!*

Donna Dettling and Jen Jones will work in December and January to create orientation materials for the new deacons and a strategy to ensure a fantastic 2025 with a fully supported Deacon Team. We are grateful for Donna Dettling’s work creating the beautiful Deacon Shepherd handout for the congregation. She took a rough draft of ideas created by the deacon team and turned it into a great resource for everyone! We encourage the congregation to reach out to any of the deacons for support.

Finally, Donna will lead the project of a *Current Flock List* that we will publish in 2025. This way, everyone will be aware of Deacons and Flocks, and be more empowered to *Share the Care*.

### PrayerNet

Please send your prayer requests to [prayernet@shepherdstownpresbyterian.org](mailto:prayernet@shepherdstownpresbyterian.org). You may also call the church office at 304-876-6466 during office hours (Monday - Friday, 8am - 2pm). A couple of practical reminders as you make your requests:

- Please make sure the person for whom you are requesting prayer has given you permission. Due to privacy considerations, we are unable to share requests without that permission.
- Please indicate whether or not you would like this request to be shared in worship on Sunday morning.
- You may also indicate that you prefer to keep this request confidential among the PrayerNet Team (currently Pastor Gusti, Lynn Dampman, Jen Jones, and Mica Martin.)

**If you are having a pastoral emergency** (death of a spouse or child, life-threatening medical emergency, etc.), please contact Pastor Gusti directly at 681-283-5314. If you would like to participate in our larger PrayerNet community (as one of the 90+ who have agreed to pray), contact Lynn at the church office: [lynn@shepherdstownpresbyterian.org](mailto:lynn@shepherdstownpresbyterian.org)

### Deacon Shepherd for Animals

Carol Wood was commissioned to remind us of the holiness pets add to our lives. This includes care to those who have lost a dear companion, assistance during final days with a pet, and support when bringing a new pet into the home. Contact Carol at [cwood453@aol.com](mailto:cwood453@aol.com).





## **MEET JEN JONES - DEACON MODERATOR**

**by Larry and Joyce Neumark**

Growing up in Huntington, WV, Jen and her family were active members of Otterbein United Methodist Church. The family often spent social and vacation times with their church family.

She attended Shepherd College in the late 70s, but graduated from Marshall University in Huntington with a B.S. degree in Social Work in 1982. She has lived in seven states including WV, RI, VA, PA, IN, AZ and CA. While in Arizona she studied Instructional Technology at Arizona State University in pursuit of a Master's in Education.

Having family in Shepherdstown since the 1970s, she fell in love with the town during her college years here and after living in AZ and CA for 16 years, she chose Shepherdstown when she returned east in 2001.

After visiting SPC over the years for various events and services such as Peacefest, she attended a service on Christmas Eve 2019 and began attending online during Covid. She felt a great fit and received messages of comfort during that time. She joined the church in 2021 and received a call in 2022 to become a Deacon. She served in this capacity for a year and began moderating the group when Debbie Romano stepped down to pursue her own ministry.

Jen explained the ministry of a deacon as set forth in Scripture is one of compassion, witness, and service. At SPC, Deacon Shepherds care for a small group (flock) including prayer, encouragement and practical support such as connecting flock members to meals and transportation. As Deacon Moderator, she collaborates with Pastor Gusti and Donna Dettling, her co-Moderator. In addition to her Deacon responsibilities, she also volunteers to work on the PrayerNet team, where SPC members and friends request prayers for joys and concerns which are then prayed for by a group of over 90 people.

Jen has a farmette just south of town where she lives with her furry family of horses and dogs. Her nieces and nephews and extended family live in the area.

She has worked as a facilitator and leadership development consultant most of her career, including hospitals, retail, and behavioral health organizations. She currently consults with clients including Franklin Covey and the US Geological Survey.

She always admired her father, a carpenter and builder. She says he was gentle, kind, strong and smart. He took her with him on mission trips around the world where her worldview changed and grew.

Some of her favorite writers are Barbara Kingsolver, Michael Pollan and Ann Patchett. Favorite movies include *City of Angels*, *The Mission*, and *Life is Beautiful*.

Thank you, Jen, for sharing a little about yourself for *The Messenger*.



## **PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN**

### **by Donna Dettling, Co-Moderator**

At the November 7 Presbyterian Women meeting, Elaine Hurd did a wonderful job leading seventeen of us in a discussion about Chapters 2 and 3 in the book *Always with Us? – What Jesus Really Said about the Poor*, by Rev. Dr. Liz

Theoharis. She invited discussion around a number of points, including: 1) whether the poor benefit from upgrades to their local infrastructure, 2) how God can use anyone, including outcasts, to spread his word, and 3) that many people suffer from ‘poverty of the spirit.’ We emphasized the need to include people living with poverty when discussing policy and system changes that should be put in place to alleviate poverty.

To commemorate a long-time member of the SPC PW group as she prepares to move, we presented Melinda Landolt with an Honorary Life Membership to Presbyterian Women. This included a certificate and pin from PCUSA, as well as a prayer shawl and card from our group, and a celebratory cake. We expressed our gratitude for Melinda’s many years of service in various capacities, and highlighted her work with the Prayer Shawl ministry. She let us know that as of the meeting date, 565 prayer shawls have been presented to members and friends of SPC since the program’s inception and she has kept a list of every person who has received one!

We decided as a group to change books for our study, and starting with our December meeting we will be reading *Poverty, By America*, by Pulitzer Prize winning author Matthew Desmond. This thought-provoking book was used by the Sunday Seminar in their series on poverty, and will surely inspire some interesting dialog in our meetings. We collected the PW Thank Offering, and discussed some upcoming events that relate to our poverty study.

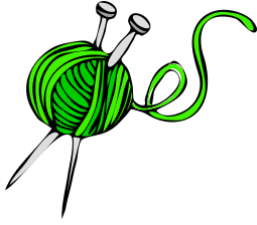
Thank you to all who attended and volunteered at our November meeting. We invite you to join us on **Thursday, December 5, at 10:00 am in the Fellowship Hall (or on Zoom), as we discuss Chapter 1 in the *Poverty, By America* book.**



### **CELEBRATING MELINDA LANDOLT**

At its November meeting, the SPC Presbyterian Women (PW) recognized Melinda Landolt by presenting her with the Honorary Life Membership Award. This national award was established in the Presbyterian Church to honor faithful service to the women’s organization and to the church. Since joining PW in 2007, not only has Melinda been a faithful member, but she has also served as a co-Moderator, stepped up to lead numerous lesson discussions and for years managed the PW prayer shawl ministry. She is certainly deserving of this award.

Melinda and her husband John are long-time members of SPC, and have both contributed to the life of the congregation in many significant ways. Although they will be moving to Winchester, VA, we look forward to Melinda’s continuing presence in PW via the magic of Zoom. We wish them Godspeed as they embark on this next chapter in their lives.



## **YARNS AND THREADS PRAYER SHAWL MINISTRY**

The Presbyterian Women's (PW) prayer shawl ministry began in 2002. Over the years 565 prayer shawls have been gifted to SPC members, their family members and friends of the church. The prayer shawl is meant as a reminder that we are beloved children of God surrounded by the prayers and love of people around us. If you knit or crochet, we would welcome your contribution to this continuing ministry. Participation in PW is not required.

Our Yarns and Threads needlework group meets the last Saturday of each month at 1:00 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall. This is a time to knit prayer shawls or work on any needlework craft in the company of friends. All are welcome. If you need additional information, contact Elaine Hurd or Susan Lovell, both listed in the church directory.

## **MY TAKE ON EARTHCARE**

**by Carol Wood, Deacon for Animals**

***As a Matthew 25 church, SPC continues to explore the intersection between poverty and clean water. The Messenger invites you to share your thoughts on Earthcare.***

Years ago, Louis Armstrong sang, "What a Wonderful World." "I see skies of blue and clouds of white. The bright blessed day. The dark sacred night. And I think to myself, what a wonderful world." I am moved to tears as I am reminded of our amazing planet we call Mother Earth. Watching the evening news will remind us of how climate change is happening before our eyes: powerful hurricanes, devastating floods, out of control wildfires, polluted waters.

More needs to be done to save our climate in peril. Earthjustice.org is my beam of light in the darkness, empowering me to become more involved. Earthjustice is a "nonprofit environmental law organization, using the law to protect and fight for a sustainable future." Their mission is to "protect people's health, preserve wildlife and natural places, advance clean energy and combat climate change."

Earthjustice has 200 lawyers in place, facing off against big interests with plenty of funds and they are winning! Here are a few of Earthjustice's recent victories:

- March 2024 - A court ruling halts wolf trapping and snaring in Grizzly Bear habitat.
- July 2024 - The U.S. Court finalized a haze pollution consent decree to speed up protections for public lands.
- August 2024 - The DOT finalized protections for 28 million acres of public lands in Alaska.
- October 2024 - Updated EPA rule requires replacement of almost all lead service lines in 10 years, making our drinking water safer.

These are just a few of the successes Earthjustice has achieved; I have faith and trust in them. If you would like to see for yourself the dedication and tireless work helping to give our planet and all life that lives here a fighting chance, visit [Earthjustice.org](https://www.earthjustice.org). Mother Nature is counting on us!

