



THE MESSENGER

January 2025
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church
Shepherdstownpresbyterian.org

The Communal Realm

Maybe you don't know strength
until you've rested beneath
the branches of a magnolia tree,
feeling the weight of her regal, waxed leaves.

Maybe you don't know community
until you've watched ants
rebuild what was broken
by a world much bigger than theirs.

Maybe you don't know fortitude
until you've noticed geese
fly to the furthest border of warmth
to protect their children.

Maybe you don't know compassion
until you place your hands in the dirt
and feel the pulse of the earth,
her heart and soul welcoming you.

Maybe you don't know time
until you run your fingers over a river rock,
their skin softened by generations of magic.

Maybe you don't know yourself
until the mirror of the water
reminds you of your goodness
and brings you home again.

Kaitlin B. Curtice

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

100 W. Washington Street

P.O. Box 268

Shepherdstown, WV 25443

Shepherdstownpresbyterian.org

Church Office Hours: 8am – 2pm, Monday through Friday; 304-876-6466

office@shepherdstownpresbyterian.org

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

JANUARY WORSHIP AT SPC

Worship in January begins with the Second Sunday of Christmas, January 5.
Epiphany begins Monday, January 6, and continues throughout the month.

What is Epiphany?

Epiphany is the celebration of God's manifestation or self-revelation to the world in Jesus Christ. In particular, we celebrate the revelation of God's promise and purpose to the nations of the world, as the magi came from the East to worship the Christ child, and God's covenant of grace is extended to all who believe the good news of Christ Jesus. The symbolism of light is important not only because of the star that guided the magi, but as it relates to the bright dawning of God's self-revelation in Christ.

For Christians, Christmas marks the coming of God to us; Epiphany celebrates the appearance of the Lord in the midst of humanity. The Christmas stories of the birth of Immanuel declare the divine entry; Epiphany extols the revelation of God to the world in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

Listed below are the lectionary readings for the month. The sermon each week will be based on one of these readings.

Sunday, January 5

Second Sunday of Christmas

Communion

Jeremiah 31:7-14
Psalm 147:12-20
Ephesians 1:3-14
John 1:(1-9) 10-18

Monday, January 6

Epiphany of the Lord

Isaiah 60:1-6
Psalm 72:1-7; 10-14
Ephesians 3:1-2
Matthew 2:1-12

Sunday, January 12

Baptism of Our Lord

Isaiah 43:1-7
Psalm 29
Acts 8:14-17
Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Sunday, January 19

Second Sunday of Epiphany

Isaiah 62:1-5
Psalm 36:5-10
1 Corinthians 12:1-11
John 2:1-11

Sunday, January 26

Third Sunday of Epiphany

Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10
Psalm 19
1 Corinthians 12:12-31a
Luke 4:14-21

CHILDREN AND YOUTH



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

December kicked off with the youth group and me leading the service on the first day of Advent. It was a huge gift to experience the season of hope along with these wonderful youth leaders. Their leadership continued throughout the month as they assisted me with engaging our youngest members during Sunday service First Pew.

As the month of Advent came to a close, we were preparing for the joyous Prepare the Way service and I find myself remembering these youth members when they were our youngest kiddos. I am filled with both hope and joy for the incredible young humans with whom we are in community. We continue to need volunteers for the Children's ministry and welcome all to join us in this wonderful programming.





DECEMBER SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

- **Treasurer's Report:** Income picked up a bit in November, and expenses are within budget. However, we still have large expenses before the end of the year (Presbytery and remaining Mission). At this point, our year-end bottom line should fall within the 2024 budget.
- **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. As of December 11, 69 pledges were received for the operating fund totaling \$214,292. Pledges are critical to the budgeting process. Please submit your pledges today.
- **Budget Process:** A 2025 budget will be drafted based on input from the SPC committees and staffing costs developed by the personnel committee and approved by the session at their December meeting, including Pastor Gusti's terms of call approved at the Congregational Meeting on December 8. The session will finalize the 2025 budget at a special meeting on January 25 considering the pledged income.
- **Social Justice:** The committee's immediate focus is on local immigrant support. Creating closer alliance with Mountain State Justice for legal advice from its immigration attorneys. EPYA group is expanding outreach to LGBTQ youth to provide a safe space, and to offer space for parents to meet.
- **Deacons:** The Deacons are implementing the 'share the care' structure to work together to care for SPC families. Families can reach out to any Deacon for support.
- **Christmas Eve Services:** The Christmas Eve services will be at 8 p.m. and 11 p.m. The 8 p.m. service will be family-oriented and the 11 p.m. service will be contemplative.

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.

SPECIAL SUNDAY SEMINAR SERIES Please join us January 12, 19, and 26, 2025, to hear presentations on one of our Matthew 25 initiatives: Clean Water. Presentations by Than Hitt, Bill Howard, and Kay Schultz will cover topics on the risks and resilience for Jefferson County water, what tools and programs are available to protect water resources, and how you can help the Town Run Watershed. These sessions are in conjunction with the Earth Care Committee. We will meet in Fellowship Hall at 9:30 a.m. on each of these Sundays, or you can join via Zoom. The link is:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/3048766466?pwd=cnhPY3kyeG9pbUdGSmZQVVIEM2Jodz09>

FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP

BUDGET AT A GLANCE THROUGH November 30, 2024

Actual (11 months)

| | |
|------------------|--|
| \$301,990 | Total Income (Pledges, Additional Giving, Special Offerings) |
| <u>\$329,792</u> | Total Expenses (Pastor, Personnel, Property, Mission, Administration, Worship, Social Justice, Education, Special Offerings) |
| -\$27,802 | NET INCOME* |

Budgeted (annual)

| | |
|------------------------------|----------------|
| \$330,253 | Total Income |
| <u>\$368,407</u> | Total Expenses |
| -\$ 38,154 | NET INCOME* |
| Unrestricted Reserves | \$210,173 |

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, use the GIVE icon on the home page. You may use PayPal or a credit card
- In Church: In the offering plate on Sundays

2025 Goal: 5% above 2024 pledges



Current pledges are 86% of our goal.

\$40,491 to go!

Your pledge will make a difference.

DEACON TEAM UPDATE

by Donna Dettling, Deacon Moderator Partner

The Deacon Team had a year of capacity-building in 2024 that included strategic planning, goal-setting, collaboration, and spiritual development rooted in scripture and supporting our goals (led by Pastor Gusti). Much of this year's development included learning to pray with each other and our flocks, and discussing Biblical teachings on the power of a team to care for others.

At our March retreat, Leslie Williams grounded us in the formation and meaning of the SPC Core Commitments. We discussed what it means to *feel Radical Hospitality, Engaged Compassion, and Holistic Spirituality*, and what we as Deacons can do to ensure that **all** SPC members and friends **experience** the SPC commitments. We co-created a 2024 strategy to begin to more fully live out the commitment statements, by adopting a more collaborative approach to care for the SPC congregation that we have termed **Share the Care**.

Our team focused much of our discussions around the desire to bring awareness to who the deacons are, and ensure that the vital ministry of the deacons is not only **understood**, but is **utilized**. We brainstormed possible ways to communicate more fully to the congregation, which included doing a monthly newsletter article, introducing us during a worship service, and most importantly, collaborating on a handout to introduce the deacons and our work.

The brochure highlights our **Share the Care** approach, which means no deacon is alone in supporting the SPC congregation. If a deacon will be briefly unavailable, or needs to step away for a time, one of the team will support their flock. It also means that any member or friend of the congregation may call on **any** deacon for support. **Share the Care also involves all of you**. You may feel that others need deacon support more than you do, but we encourage each of you to lean into a relationship with your deacon: respond to their communications, share your joys and prayer requests with them, and share others' needs, as appropriate, with any of the deacons and the PrayerNet team.

In 2025, we are excited to orient and include six new Deacon Shepherds on the team: Lynne Wiseman, Eva Barnett, Elaine Hurd, Diane Kradel, Diana Eldridge, and Siri McDonald (alternate), and welcome back three deacons who took time off during 2024: Derek Smith, Diana Wesley, and Jeananne Stine. And we will celebrate the many years of deacon service by Paul Denchy, who will be stepping down as his term expires. We are grateful for those members who stepped up to serve and those returning to service. We will continue to build on the foundation we established and move forward with joy and promise. Please contact Jen Jones or Donna Dettling with any feedback or questions regarding the deacon ministry, and watch for more to come as we strive to bring this important work to the forefront.

PrayerNet

Please send your prayer requests to 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

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.



PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN **by Donna Dettling, Co-Moderator**

At our December 5 Presbyterian Women meeting, we began the study of our new book *Poverty, By America*, by Matthew Desmond, which had been used in the Sunday Seminar study on poverty. After watching an engaging interview with the author, Anne Teresa led the 14 members in attendance in a discussion of the first two chapters, which highlighted ‘The Kind of Problem Poverty Is’ and asked the question, ‘Why Haven’t We Made More Progress?’ We talked about government subsidies, and the leeway states have on how they are used (often in ways that don’t truly benefit the poor), and the fact that often the funds don’t get used at all. Another issue we touched on is the reluctance or inability of people who qualify to take advantage of programs that could help them. We acknowledged the roles that we all play in the problem of systemic poverty. And we asked how we, as individuals, can put pressure on local government officials to build more affordable housing and utilize the subsidy funds they receive in meaningful ways.

The group began a holiday collection of items needed by the Bethany House shelter in Martinsburg: blankets, pillows, laundry detergent and sanitizing products. The deadline for contributions was December 15 so we could make delivery before Christmas. In January, we will also be collecting funds for the shelter, as our local mission project continues.

We were excited to hear that our November Thank Offering collection totaled \$674 and had been sent off to the national chapter of Presbyterian Women to be used for eight national and international projects supporting women, children and families.

We extend our thanks to everyone who attended and volunteered at our December meeting, helped with the Thanksgiving dinner at The Community Cup and More, and made donations to the Thank Offering and Bethany House. We welcome you to attend our meeting on **Thursday, January 2, to discuss Chapter 3, “How We Undercut Workers”** and enjoy a soup and bread lunch at the end of the gathering. We will be **in the Fellowship Hall (or on Zoom) at 10:00 am**, and hope to see you there!

Poverty Facts

As a follow up to the fall Sunday Seminar sessions on poverty and to make you more aware of this issue facing our country, here are a few facts on poverty.

- 40% of West Virginia residents are poor or low income.
- Poverty is the 4th leading cause of death in the United States.
- 800 people die every day of long-term poverty in the nation.



Ending Hunger in Our Community Workshop: A Matthew 25 Program

by Anne Teresa

On November 16, SPC hosted a workshop facilitated by the Reverend Rebecca Barnes of the PCUSA Hunger Program. Attendees included 21 representatives from local food pantries, community markets, Shepherd University, and other churches. The purpose was to gather together those individuals and groups who have an advocacy for or stake in feeding hungry people in our area. We began the work of making connections and alliances that could address the ever-increasing food insecurity here in Shepherdstown and throughout our region.

Rev. Barnes explained the background of the Matthew 25 program, referencing Biblical passages reminding us that charity and mercy - as well as the longer term goals of changing systems and structures that keep people locked in poverty - are required of us. Barriers to providing and accessing food were identified, and the group shared information about current and planned initiatives.

The Matthew 25 organizing group plans to reconvene in January to continue the discussion. For further information contact Anne Teresa at ateresa@comcast.net

MY TAKE: STANDING UP AND SPEAKING UP FOR GAY AND TRANS YOUTH

by Pat Hamilton, Eastern Panhandle Youth Alliance (EPYA) Leadership Team

Do you ever recall being the object of a slur when you were 13 years old? How about side-eyed in a locker room? Or looked around and saw no one like you to connect with or no welcoming groups in your school to join? Adolescence is not easy, but couple that with questions about your sexual orientation or gender identity, and it feels crushing. Too many LGBTQ kids are being crushed and, this time, it's the adults doing the crushing.

All over America—some states in particular—books about LGBTQ people are banned, educators are not allowed to say gay in the classroom, and school clubs for gay youth are disappearing. Legislation focused on eliminating or reducing gender affirming care for youth with dysphoria is alive in 17 states. Here in West Virginia, children and their parents are being forced to travel to or move to another state for some types of care.

SPC has worked to counter the negative and uninformed views of LGBTQ people. We show up at Pride every year, we prominently display a progress flag on the church building, and we raise money for the EPYA youth to take educational trips. SPC sponsors films like *Mama Bears*, about conservative Christian women standing up for their gay and trans children, and supports efforts to expose anti-LGBTQ legislation. SPC also subsidizes meetings for the youth at two safe locations.*

I stopped going to Pride celebrations in my fifties, assuming that LGBTQ people were seen, heard and that there would be no going back. Now, more than ever, Pride celebrations are not just for LGBTQ people; they display to the rest of the world our joy in living out our true identities and of our resilience. And it is a reminder that all citizens have rights worth protecting, as noted by the following comments:

“Most of it is just so all these kids who do not have supportive parents have a place where they can just safely be; I come from a really positive, good household, but a lot of people don't so they really need these spaces.” *Emma, 17, Pride 2024 goer and EPYA participant*

“I met a kid who lives in an unsupportive family. The kid is going to try to come to the group {EPYA} but did tell me something along the lines of "just knowing this group exists is enough." The kid had seen our flyer at the Shepherdstown Library and reached out via email. At Pride they interacted with the current youth and even helped face paint. They were beaming and said several times, "I am so happy this group exists." *Season, Founding Member, EPYA*

The next four years will be a crusade to tell the truth, but also to know the truth. You probably know lesbian, gay and bisexual people and have little trouble explaining why you support them. Our work to be seen for our authentic selves made a difference. In spite of the assaults aimed at us in the name of protecting children and the threat of repealing Marriage Equality, most Americans support us. It becomes more problematic when we talk about transgender adults and children.

If you do not know any transgender or transitioning adults or children, it is more difficult to understand how to speak out against the language and laws that demonize them. It's harder to get to know trans people, in part, because, literally, there are so few. The hysterical trans drumbeat has focused on 3 million people. That's right, point one percent of the United States identifies as trans. None of this rhetoric is about the safety of the children or parents' rights, any more than drinking fountains were about separate but equal.

How do you tell the truth when you're not sure you understand the best way to express it? When you feel knowledgeable, it's easier to say, "Well, you're just wrong"; even if you leave it at that, you'll know it's the truth. The EPYA leadership team is committed in 2025 to speaking openly, factually and honestly about LGBTQ rights and what it actually means to be gay and trans in this country.

Erasure is an authoritarian tactic. If you remove LGBTQ history from the schools, ban books, suppress rights and mute speech, soon enough joyful, creative and exuberant kids will have nowhere to turn but inward. Their suicide rate is already double that of their peers.

I will return to maximum visibility and conversations that will annoy the heck out of some folks. It will be a long four years, but I will hold onto the words of activist Dorothy Day: "Don't worry about being effective. Just concentrate on being faithful to the truth."

**We have never felt comfortable identifying those locations in print*



January 2025

| December 2024 | | | | | | | January 2025 | | | | | | | February 2025 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|--------------|---|---|----|----|----|----|---------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| S | M | T | W | T | F | S | S | M | T | W | T | F | S | S | M | T | W | T | F | S | | | | | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 |

■ SPC

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|--|--|--|--|--|---|---|
| <p>29</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 11:00 AM Worship "Hybrid" 5:00 PM Joy Gift Dinner Fellowship Hall | <p>30</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5:00 PM Threshold Singers/Leslie Williams - FH 7:00 PM AA Group Meeting - Fellowship Hall | <p>31</p> | <p>1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff Holiday - Office Closed | <p>2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10:00 AM Presbyterian Women - FH/Zoom 1:30 PM Ordained Leader Training - Sanctuary 6:00 PM Bible at the Bar | <p>3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1:30 PM Ordained Leader Training - Sanctuary | <p>4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1:30 PM Ordained Leader Training - Sanctuary |
| <p>5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10:30 AM Called Congregational Meeting - Sanctuary "Hybrid" 11:00 AM Worship "Hybrid" 1:30 PM Ordained Leader Training - Sanctuary 4:00 PM Hymn Sing - Sanctuary 5:00 PM Community Meal in Charles Town | <p>6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7:00 PM AA Group Meeting - Fellowship Hall | <p>7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4:45 PM Girl Scout Troop Meeting | <p>8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9:30 AM Staff Meeting - Sanctuary 7:00 PM Choir Rehearsal - Choir Room with Sheila Mierlenz | <p>9</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7:00 PM Session Meeting Fellowship Hall & Zoom | <p>10</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1:00 PM Paul Krader's 80th Birthday Celebration Luncheon | <p>11</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1:00 PM Celebration of Life Service Ed Rakowski |
| <p>12</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8:30 AM Early Worship Service 11:00 AM Worship "Hybrid" 11:00 AM Sunday Studio Classroom | <p>13</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7:00 PM AA Group Meeting - Fellowship Hall | <p>14</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10:30 AM La Leche League 4:45 PM Girl Scout Troop Meeting | <p>15</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10:00 AM Elaine Hurd's Book Club 7:00 PM Choir Rehearsal - Choir Room with Sheila Mierlenz | <p>16</p> | <p>17</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2:30 PM Celebration of Life Service Joel Blunk | <p>18</p> |
| <p>19</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8:30 AM Early Worship Service 11:00 AM Worship "Hybrid" 11:00 AM Sunday Studio Classroom | <p>20</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7:00 PM AA Group Meeting - Fellowship Hall | <p>21</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4:45 PM Girl Scout Troop Meeting | <p>22</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7:00 PM Choir Rehearsal - Choir Room with Sheila Mierlenz | <p>23</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5:00 PM Deacon's Meeting - Fellowship Hall | <p>24</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10:00 AM Special Session Meeting - Finalize Budget - FH/Hybrid 1:00 PM Tarns & Threads Group Fellowship Hall | <p>25</p> |
| <p>26</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ordination Installation of Officers/Board Services 8:30 AM Early Worship Service 9:00 AM TENT Concert Matt (Sheila) 11:00 AM Worship "Hybrid" 11:00 AM Sunday Studio Classroom | <p>27</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7:00 PM AA Group Meeting - Fellowship Hall | <p>28</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4:45 PM Girl Scout Troop Meeting | <p>29</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9:30 AM Staff Meeting - Sanctuary 7:00 PM Choir Rehearsal - Choir Room with Sheila Mierlenz | <p>30</p> | <p>31</p> | <p>1</p> |