



THE MESSENGER

March 2025

Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church
Shepherdstownpresbyterian.org

PASTOR'S NOTE: "GROUNDED IN THE SPIRIT"

March begins this year with A View from Eternity: a Celebration of Life for our beloved Cari Simon on Saturday, March 1 (10:30 a.m.) followed by Transfiguration Sunday on March 2, with our Ritual of Palms to Ashes marking the turn toward the Season of Lent.

We take this view from eternity, marking this turn, even as we feel fully the anxiety of the moment. Into our anxiety, our tradition offers the contemplative rhythms of the Season of Lent to ground us in spiritual practices as we tend to the most vulnerable in our community and beyond and as we speak truth to power through our ministries of justice and wholeness.

The spiritual practices of the season of Lent intentionally align the anxiety of our time with the journey of Jesus toward the cross in his own time. As he grounded his own actions in fasting, prayer, simplicity, giving, humility, conviction, and love, our worship and spiritual life invites us to do the same.

For the month of March that means an Ash Wednesday service of sackcloth and ashes on March 5, recovering the ancient Hebrew practice of public mourning and humble commitment toward justice based on Isaiah 58. Our traditional imposition of ashes will include an opportunity to pin a ribbon of sackcloth on our clothing or place a larger ribbon of sackcloth around our necks. We may continue to wear this symbolic sackcloth throughout the Season of Lent if we wish.

Sundays in March will build on the sackcloth and ashes theme, introducing the justice implications of communal fasting on March 9, a series of personal prayer stations in worship on March 16, a liturgy of letting go on March 23, and a liturgy of giving on March 30. The practice of communion each week will deepen our grounding in the Spirit as we engage the spiritual practice of the week.

Through it all, we pray not that our anxiety will necessarily be lessened but rather that it will be refined in deepening solidarity with all who suffer anxiety, injustice, and oppression. We pray as well that the view from eternity from Transfiguration to Easter will inspire us with the trust that faith, hope, and love will always carry the day.

In the Grounding of the Spirit,
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 (she/her), 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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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

"Grounded In The Spirit"

Sunday, March 2

The View From Eternity

Luke 9:28-36

Transfiguration Sunday

Communion/Memorial Moment/Litany of Palms to Ashes

They saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to Jesus.

Wednesday, March 5

The Fast We Choose

Isaiah 58:6

Ash Wednesday

Liturgy of Sackcloth and Ashes

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?

Sunday, March 9

Grounded In The Fast

Matthew 6:17

First Sunday in Lent

Communion/Blessing the Confirmands/Liturgy of Washing and Anointing

When you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face.

Sunday, March 16

Grounded In Prayer

Matthew 6:6

Second Sunday in Lent

Communion

Prayer Stations: Prayer Shawl, Finger Labyrinth, Prayer Beads, Prayer Journal, and more

When you pray, go into your room and shut the door.

Sunday, March 23

Grounded in Simplicity

Matthew 6:19

Third Sunday in Lent

Communion/Liturgy of Letting Go

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal.

Sunday, March 30

Grounded in Giving

Matthew 6:2-4

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Communion/Liturgy of Giving

When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.



CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Christa Mastrangelo Joyce

Director of Children and Youth Formation

The lives of our SPC youth are full and active right now! We are beginning the conversation of confirmation with four of our youth. We included the whole youth group in the walk this year, even those who've previously confirmed.

Our focus is on what is called a "missional confirmation" which is influenced by the Latin roots of the word confirmation, "confirmatio," meaning "to encourage, strengthen."

While the youth will be encouraged to consider joining the church and why we hold this as an important part of the community together, missional confirmation is not only about joining the church; it's about joining the missional project initiated by Jesus and entrusted to the church.

Missional confirmation strengthens confirmands:

- in their identities as God's image-bearing stewards of the goodness and beauty of creation.
- in the Spirit's gifts of wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and the fear of the Lord, and joy in God's presence.
- in their vocations as members of the priesthood of all believers, commissioned for missional engagement in the world.

As we enter into this contemplative journey together, each youth member will engage in a service project, something the church has already witnessed in Hazel Hitt's work for The Children's Home Society of West Virginia. They are also blessed with the companionship of a mentor, someone who is a member of and considered an elder of the church. More on this will unfold in the coming months. Please consider how you can pray for all of the youth during this time, and particularly Joel Dillow, Hazel Hitt, Mileur Bailey, and Evelyn Bailey.

The children of Sunday Studio continue to be engaged in the theme of "Make Peace." Most recently, this theme led us to consider how making peace involves learning to really listen to others, with Matthew 15:21-28 as part of the guide. Our final part of the "make peace" theme will be to consider how we are called to be vulnerable and take risks using Samuel 25:2-28 to guide us.

What a prescient time it is for each of us to consider how we might be makers of peace within ourselves, our community, and the world. Please be praying that these seeds be watered in our littlest ones, that they may grow in this way of peace.



FEBRUARY SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

Matthew 25: The Matthew 25 initiative emphasizes the support for Community Cup, Food Security, and Clean Water.

Community Cup -- Christa is leading yoga devotional worship at Community Cup on the 4th Friday at 7 p.m. each month this year. The many upcoming events planned at the Community Cup are posted on their Facebook page.

Food Security -- SPC is hosting a workshop on February 20 to be presented by the WV Mountaineer Food Bank, the largest emergency food provider in West Virginia. The Food Bank will provide advocacy training for those in our area working in food insecurity. It will focus on how policy decisions are made at the local and state levels, and how to better engage with our representatives during West Virginia's 60-day legislative session.

Clean Water -- In partnership with the SPC Earth Care Committee, three sessions on clean water were presented during the Sunday Seminar time slot on January 12, 19 and 26. Than Hitt, Kay Schulz and Bill Howard presented different aspects of local water issues and current threats facing our region. These sessions were well attended.

Oxfam Hunger Banquet: Barbara Hartman presented the plans for the SPC Oxfam Banquet scheduled for Sunday, March 23 at the War Memorial Community Club building. The purpose is to provide an experience that will bring hunger, poverty, and inequity issues to life. The Planning committee for the SPC sponsored event includes Christa Joyce, Diana Eldridge, Donna Dettling, Pat Hamilton, Carolee Youngblood, Anne Teresa, Barbara Hartman, and D'arcy Rea (friend of SPC and registered dietitian). Suggested donation is \$10 per person at the door. Any excess money after expenses will be donated to a local charity or Oxfam International.

Moderator: Pastor Gusti highlighted her work since the last session meeting: studying, teaching, and preaching the Word; celebrating the Sacraments; praying with and for the congregation; serving the larger church; building ecumenical relationships; and equipping and enabling the people.

Ministerial association has endorsed community book reading of "Saints and Villains" by Denise Giardina on the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The book discussions will be held at Trinity Episcopalian Church on Tuesdays during Lent beginning March 11, at 7 p.m. The author will be in town for a book reading on April 8 and might join book discussions via Zoom.

Sabbatical planning is underway under guidance of a planning committee comprised of Anne Teresa, Keri Mahoney, Donna Dettling, and Jen Jones. The sabbatical theme will be for Gusti and the congregation to reflect on the identity of SPC. The session will apply for a grant to support the cost of the sabbatical.

A leadership retreat will be held on February 21 and 22 facilitated by Rev. Harry Daniel to revitalize the energy and commitment, clarify expectations, and identify next steps for SPC leaders.

Deacons: The Deacons and Pastor Gusti have started a support group for those feeling the impact of executive actions taken in recent weeks.

Worship: Inspired by the drumming circle during Joel Blunk's memorial service, the session approved a similar meditative, healing activity separate from worship. Mica and Sam will explore options.

Adult Ed: On February 9 we began a 13-week session using Brian McLaren's book *Life After Doom: Wisdom and Courage for a World Falling Apart*. Despite its somewhat bleak title, this book squarely faces climate change and offers up hope through discussions of resilience and engagement.

Communications: The committee has many projects underway. Proposals for updating the SPC website are being received and reviewed for presentation to the session in March. A survey was distributed to understand the readership participation and preference for The Messenger, SPC's monthly newsletter. (More writers are needed!) The church directory is being updated, and due to popular demand, additional printings of the Welcome brochure are needed.

Social Justice: The committee’s immediate focus is on local immigrant support. The Immigrant and Refugee Support Committee (IRSC) core team is focused on connecting immigrants with critical resources and developing a list of volunteers to help with specific needs as they become known, such as providing transportation to appointments (court, doctors), writing letters of support, and distributing Know Your Rights information. We have identified pro bono lawyers, but doctors and therapists who will provide pro bono services are also needed.

Planning is underway for a SPC Pride service for Sunday, June 1. We’re also continuing to closely support our Eastern Panhandle Youth Alliance (EPYA) children to learn more about their needs and be effective allies.

An effort is underway to better understand the history of Indigenous people who lived in what is now the eastern panhandle of WV and to share the history with the congregation. To that end, a land acknowledgement statement has been written for SPC by a member of an Indigenous tribe living and working in our community.

The SPC Session meets the 2nd Thursday of the month at 7 p.m. 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.

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

BUDGET AT A GLANCE THROUGH January 31, 2025

<u>2025 at a Glance</u>	<u>2025 Budget (12 Months)</u>	<u>Actuals (through January 31)</u>	<u>Actuals as % of 12-Month Budget</u>
Operating Income	\$384,104	\$119,465	31.0%
Operating Expenses	\$388,852	\$ 39,233	10.1%

We are one month, or 8.3% of the way into the new year. We’ve already received 31% of our anticipated annual operating income, largely in part to one-time special gifts from the congregation. Expenses are tracking as expected.

Poverty Facts

- In 2019, the World Bank estimated that 650 million people, roughly one in twelve, were living on less than \$2.15 a day.
- In 2023, West Virginia's poverty rate of 15.6% was the 7th highest rate among all the states.



UPCOMING EVENT

SPC OXFAM HUNGER BANQUET

Food insecurity is a frightening fact of life for many in our own community and around the world. Join us for an event that grew from an initial Oxfam America gathering in 1974 to an international movement to bring awareness and alleviate hunger and poverty in our world. **Watch for your invitation to the SPC Oxfam Hunger Banquet, to**

be held on Sunday, March 23, at 4:00 p.m. at the Community Club (War Memorial Building) in Shepherdstown.

At this interactive and memorable event, you will draw a ticket that assigns you to a high, middle, or low-income tier, and a meal that coincides with how someone at that income level might experience food. Your ticket will include the portrait of an individual who might live in these income groups around the world. A master of ceremonies will guide participants through the experience, and guests will come together to share their thoughts and take action after the meal.

YOU CAN MAKE AN IMPACT, and following the event you will know ways to support the fight against food insecurity locally and beyond. Proceeds from your banquet donation will be sent to Oxfam International to aid in their work to end poverty and injustice around the globe. You will also be invited to bring non-perishable food items to be given to Shepherdstown Shares.

Families are welcome to bring their youth and children to join in the experience. We hope you will plan to attend, and if possible, be a volunteer to help with set-up, hosting, or clean-up. **Let's make this pilot event a successful one which we can grow and share with our community in upcoming months!**

DEACON TEAM UPDATE

Donna Dettling, Deacon Moderator

All of the Deacons were busy contacting their flock members during February. Those new to the team introduced themselves. The returning Deacons confirmed that the relationship is continuing, or introduced themselves if they got new flock members as we evened the flock lists where needed. We hope everyone will soon be able to identify their Deacon, and that you will strive to make a connection with them.

Jen Jones decided to step down as the Deacon Moderator as of the end of January, to focus on her Deacon duties and her work. Pastor Gusti explained the Deacon Moderator transition process during our January meeting, and let everyone know that Donna Dettling was willing to step into the Moderator role. There were no self-nominations or nominations from the floor, and **the Deacon team unanimously voted to elect Donna as the new Moderator**. Gusti led us in a Litany of Transition to celebrate Jen's year of service and share with her how much she meant to the team, and to each of us personally. Jen was instrumental in restructuring the way the Deacons operate, and in helping us determine our priorities and goals. She provided a sturdy foundation that Donna can build on as she takes over this ministry. **We thank Jen for her vital work and welcome Donna into the role**. The official transfer was done during worship on February 2.

Pastor Gusti and some of the deacons have heard from a number of people in the church that are either **feeling the direct impact of executive actions taken in recent weeks, are anxious about a possible impact on their lives, or are grieving the overall state of the nation**. In response, **we have started a support group** for anyone interested in participating. The first session was held on Tuesday, February 11, at 5:00 pm on Zoom. Eleven people participated, getting grounded in readings and music, and then given time for each to discuss their current situation, feelings, and story. The second session was scheduled for February 18. The cadence of these meetings will be determined as we move forward, and promoted accordingly. **If you would like to join the group, please contact Donna at donna.dettling@gmail.com.**

We look forward to full Deacon participation at the **Leadership Retreat** on February 21 and 22. Our next Deacon Meeting will be on March 1. The new team is engaged and starting the year with much momentum!

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 Donna Dettling, Co-Moderator

Our February 6 Presbyterian Women meeting was on one of our many 'weather event' days, so we decided ahead of time to do it by Zoom only, rather than have to reschedule. It turned out to be a great option, because we had seventeen women in attendance! Rie Wilson did a fine job of keeping things orderly and helping us take turns to speak as we did introductions around the group to welcome new participant Connie Ross (not an easy feat with so many women.)

Julie Tucker led the discussion on Chapter 4 in our book *Poverty, By America*, by Matthew Desmond, which addressed 'How We Force the Poor to Pay More.' The conversation revolved around the topics of housing and banking, including how landlords make more from poor people despite them living in the less favorable units, and how bank and payday loan fees multiply, often becoming more than the check itself. The numbers are staggering: **annually, over \$11 billion in overdraft fees, \$1.6 billion in check cashing fees, and up to \$9.8 billion in payday loan fees are collected, primarily from those who can least afford it.** We talked about Desmond's statement, "Poverty isn't simply the condition of not having enough money. It's the condition of not having enough choice and being taken advantage of because of that." We all shared stories and observations, creating a very rich dialogue.

Lynne Wiseman reported that **we collected \$640** last month for the **Bethany House shelter in Martinsburg**, which will be a big help to them as they provide for women and children in our area.

Diana Eldridge provided information on the **upcoming SPC Oxfam Hunger Banquet** which will be held on Sunday, March 23, at the Community Club in Shepherdstown. This event will provide an experience around food insecurity, and all were encouraged to attend and volunteer for set-up, clean-up or ushering duties. More details will be available to the congregation soon.

Donna Dettling mentioned the **formation of an SPC support group** for those impacted by recent executive orders, fearing impact, or having difficulty with this time of grieving. PW members were encouraged to participate or let others know about the group.

After other business was taken care of, we closed with prayers around the group, and a special prayer for justice, which was very fitting for the current climate in our nation.

Special thanks to everyone willing to attend this meeting by Zoom. It was a warm time of fellowship even though we weren't in the same room. All that was missing was being able to share snacks! Please plan to join us at **our March 6 meeting at 10 a.m. in the Fellowship Hall or on Zoom, to discuss Chapter 5 & 6, 'How We Rely on Welfare' and 'How We Buy Opportunity.'** We welcome you!



VICTORIA'S HOUSE PROJECT

Hazel Hitt

This spring, I'm doing a community service project that's also part of my SPC confirmation. My project is a campaign to support Victoria's House, a local organization that helps kids who have survived abuse or who are experiencing traumatic living situations and gives them the support they need. I'm grateful to SPC for supporting me and this project, which has three main elements.

First, we held a Valentine's Day Bake Sale, and it was a success! The community really came together, and it was so heartwarming to see so many of you support this amazing cause. We sold a variety of delicious treats and we are so grateful for the generosity of everyone who contributed.

Second, the church made generous donations for our Super Bowl Sunday offering, and all of those donations are going directly to Victoria's House as well.

Third, for supporting Victoria's House and the amazing work they do, we also launched a GoFundMe campaign. We have raised a good amount so far but the campaign is still ongoing, and I want to encourage everyone to continue contributing if you are able. Every single donation, no matter the size, is truly appreciated and will make a difference in the lives of these children. Your generosity is already having a meaningful impact on the lives of the kids who need it most.

This has also been especially meaningful to me because it is linked to my project. As a part of my confirmation project and my confirmation journey, I wanted to do something that would make a real difference in my community, and this cause has been perfect for that. It's been such a blessing being able to put my faith into action by helping these kids, and by providing support to the organizations that mean so much to me and my community.



Throughout this project I have had the opportunity to visit some great places in our town. I got to donate 60 cookies to the local fire department, where I got the opportunity to connect with some wonderful people who are also involved in supporting this amazing community. I also had the chance to drop off Valentine's Day cards at Victoria's House where I got to talk with the people who work there around the clock. These small acts of kindness helped me see firsthand how important it is to reach out to those who may need a little extra love, care, and support.

Whether you have bought some treats, donated to the GoFundMe, donated last Sunday or simply offered words of encouragement, your involvement has made a difference. I'm so grateful for the opportunity to be a part of this cause, and I'm excited to see where we can go from here with your help! If you still want to help, please use this link for the GoFundMe page: <https://gofund.me/8960fa6e>

SUPPORT GROUP FOR THOSE AFFECTED BY EXECUTIVE ORDERS

If you or your loved ones have been personally affected by, or are anxious about, the recent executive orders related to federal workers, DEI initiatives, immigration, transgender identity and care, and more, or if you are grieving the overall state of the nation, **your church is here for you!** If you would like to **participate in a support group**, please contact the church office or Donna Dettling, donna.dettling@gmail.com for the Zoom link to the meetings.

The group began on February 11, and will continue to meet weekly on Tuesdays, at 5 p.m. on Zoom. You are welcome to drop in when you would like; there is no commitment to coming each week. If the group gets too large, we will add a second group to ensure that all are given time and space to share.

Come for spiritual grounding, support and sharing, and an opportunity to discuss possible actions that could be taken. We welcome you to join us in this sacred space. In the meantime, you are always encouraged to contact your Deacon directly and/or make an appointment through the church office to meet with Pastor Gusti.



Please update your church directory:

John and Melinda Landolt
109 Proclamation Drive
Winchester, VA 22603

John: jlandolt@shepherd.edu
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They no longer have a landline.