



THE MESSENGER

February 2026

Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church
Shepherdstownpresbyterian.org

PASTOR'S NOTE: The Sabbatical Begins

After months of preparation, after naming ourselves beloved and recommitting to justice, and practicing shared leadership — we cross the threshold together.

My sabbatical officially begins February 15. But the transition begins sooner: On February 1, I will lead worship while Rev. Mary Jane Hitt preaches, and we will commission her together for this season of guest ministry. On February 8, I will sit among you in the pews while Mary Jane leads, and you will commission me for this journey of rest, healing, and return. The following week, I will remain quietly available to ensure the transition is taking root. Then, on February 15, I begin in earnest.

While I ground myself in what it means to be “home” and then retrace the journey of my ministry, SPC will continue practicing what we have proclaimed all year: Sabbath as refuge, resilience, resistance, and reimagining. Mary Jane’s gifted leadership will guide worship. The Deacons’ steady presence will continue to care. The Session’s practical discernment will continue to make wise decisions. The newly organized Work in the World team will continue our commitments to Earth Care, Inclusion and Equity, Justice and Peace, and eradicating Systemic Poverty.

While I will officially return from sabbatical on June 15, I will ease my way back into the fullness of ministry by overlapping with Mary Jane through the end of June. In July, the parents of our congregation will preach — sharing the wisdom of their own journeys, practicing the shared leadership we ordained in January. I will return to the pulpit on August 2. I expect to work with the Sabbatical Planning Team to develop worship themes through the late summer and fall that reflect on what we have all learned through this sabbatical period. I am looking forward to it!

In the meantime, while I love each of you dearly, I need to ask you to refrain from reaching out to me until after June 15. If something happens that you think I need to know — a death in the congregation, a crisis, a joy — please contact Mary Jane, Suellen Myers, or Jen Jones. They will make sure I receive the information if it is truly necessary.

All the way back in September, I wrote: "This 'Great Sabbath' sabbatical year invites us to receive Sabbath not as a break from life, but as God's rhythm for life — a rhythm of liberation, healing, and presence that renews us all."

We have practiced that rhythm together: listening to cries, birthing hope, protecting the vulnerable, claiming our belovedness, recommitting to justice, installing leaders to carry the work forward.

We continue to practice that rhythm together — while apart — these next few months. I will see you on the other side of rest — healed, renewed, and grateful beyond measure for the ministry we share.

With you on the journey, *even from a distance*
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 and Handbell Director

Sam Jannotta (he/him), Accompanist

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

Camryn Monroe (she/her), Nursery Manager

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

lynn@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

Worship at SPC

February 2026

Sunday, February 1 A Manifesto of Holy Resistance

Matthew 5:1-12

Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time
Communion

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Sunday, February 8 The Salt and Light of Resistance

Matthew 5:13-20

Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time

You are the salt of the earth . . . you are the light of the world.

Sunday, February 15 A Transfigured Vision for a Troubled World Matthew 17:1-9

The Transfiguration of the Lord
Palms to Ashes

Litany of

This is my Son, the Beloved; . . . listen to him!

Lenten Series: *Everything in Between*

This series is an invitation to navigate the polarities in our lives with more faith, intention, and openness to be transformed. Each weekly sub-theme explores two supposed binaries, like “faith & works” or “rest & growth,” or “grief & hope.” This Lent, we’re trusting that God shows up in shades of gray, rainbow hues, and everywhere in between.

Wednesday, February 18

Intention and Action

Luke 9:51-62

Ash Wednesday

When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

Sunday, February 22

Stranger and Neighbor

Luke 10:25-37

First Sunday of Lent

Who is my neighbor?



SPOTLIGHT ON

MARY JANE HITT
SABBATICAL PASTOR



IN HER OWN WORDS:

Much of my life has been centered in West Virginia. I was born there, graduated (twice) from WVU, and lived there for twenty or so years with my husband, Bill. We raised our children, Than and Amanda, there.

After completing my Master's Degree in sociology from Boston University, I returned to Morgantown where Bill was in his final year at the WVU School of Dentistry. During that year I taught sociology at Waynesburg University and WVU.

A couple years later, Bill and I bundled up our eight-month-old son and headed to Jamaica, where we worked with a congregation of the United Church of Jamaica and Grand Cayman. Bill headed up a dental clinic there and I taught French at Decarteret College (a boys' boarding school). Our daughter was born in Jamaica.

When we returned to the States, we spent a couple years in Wilmington, Delaware, and then relocated to Morgantown. My mother had died and my father had retired as Morgantown's City Manager, and we felt the need to support him and the desire to return "home." Bill established a dental office there and I began working at WVU. We joined First Presbyterian Church of Morgantown and both were active, serving as ruling elders, teachers, choir members, and volunteers.

After a couple years working at WVU as a Classification and Compensation Analyst in the Department of Human Resources, I began work on my doctoral degree in Education Administration, and I served as an intern to the Vice President for Academic Affairs. That led to my employment as Special Assistant to the President and then, for the final seven years of my work there, as Executive Officer for Social Justice where I headed the President's Office for Social Justice.

In 1997 I sensed a call to pastoral ministry and resigned from WVU in order to pursue a Master of Divinity degree from Duke Divinity School. After graduating in 2000, I accepted a call to serve as pastor of Providence United Presbyterian Church (PUPC) in Scranton, Pennsylvania. I served there for a decade until retiring. PUPC was just a five-minute walk from Marywood University, where every year I taught a Christian Foundations class.

While at PUPC, I was active in Lackawanna Presbytery, chairing the Committee on Ministry and the Committee on Preparation for Ministry. I also served on the Permanent Judicial Commission of the Synod of the Trinity. Since retiring and relocating to Ohio to be near our daughter's family, I have been active in the Presbytery of Scioto Valley, serving on the Commission for Ministry and the Commission for Presbytery Operations. I also chaired an Administrative Commission charged with presenting a reorganization plan for the Presbytery. (That plan was approved and is now in its third year of implementation.)

The first time I attended a worship service at Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church was some sixteen years ago, soon after Than and Mary Anne Hitt moved to Washington Street and began attending services here. Since then Bill and I have looked forward to our visits to town and, in particular, to SPC.

When Pastor Gusti approached me about the possibility of serving the church during her Sabbatical leave, I was intrigued, but not yet convinced. Having been retired from pastoral ministry for more than a decade, and realizing that we would have to relocate from our home in Westerville, Ohio, I was open to this opportunity but also a bit daunted by it.

However, as I thought and prayed about all this, it became more and more evident that I should say yes. To be clear, I would not have agreed to serve as a guest pastor for any other congregation in any other place. But SPC? *This* congregation? *This* community? A faith community that is doing the hard work of justice – that puts into action its commitment to *Radical Hospitality, Holistic Spirituality, and Engaged Compassion*? And an opportunity to spend almost six months in the same town as our son's family? The answer had to be yes.

And so I entered into a contract with the SPC Session and Shenandoah Presbytery to provide leadership in the following areas while Gusti is away: conducting worship, providing pastoral care in coordination with the Deacon Shepherds, moderating Session, and serving as head of staff.

Pastor Gusti's Sabbatical leave provides not just her, but the congregation as a whole, an opportunity to explore what it means to walk in the way and in the spirit of Jesus at this time of national and international turmoil. Together may we hold onto the hope that is ours in the knowledge that nothing in life or in death can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Editor's Note: In addition to the above, Mary Jane enjoys playing piano, reading, puzzling, knitting, and quilting.

Mary Jane will practice Sabbath on Fridays, but will be available 9 a.m.-9 p.m. other days. Office hours will be by appointment. She can be reached by calling the church office at 304-876-6466 or her phone at 304-712-8700. She can be reached via email at: maryjane@shepherdstownpresbyterian.org.

Welcome, Mary Jane. We look forward to your time with us!



CHILDREN AND YOUTH UPDATE

Christa Mastrangelo Joyce
Director of Children and Youth Formation

Although it can get lost in the buildup to and excitement of Christmas, Epiphany is a special time in our church calendar. To celebrate this time, we hosted our first (hopefully annual!) Epiphany camp. On the Friday before Epiphany Sunday, the youth group, children, and adult volunteers gathered for a half-day camp called “Follow a Star.” The camp offered us the opportunity to connect with the story of Epiphany and prepare ourselves for the wonder of the season, so that we could share the story and wonder with our congregation on Epiphany’s youth-led Sunday service.

With the help of art teacher Amanda Groff, the youth group spent much of the camp day making props for our Sunday service. Additionally, the teens worked alongside our elementary students to create crafts, read books, play games, and celebrate with food.

Elementary students enjoyed a full day of story books about the Magi as well as an imaginative journey with a camel. They made their own Magi crowns and dowel stick camels, then used their crafts to play a fun game with gold coins and glow sticks. They experienced frankincense and myrrh, learned about the tradition of chalking an entrance door at Epiphany, used glow-in-the-dark paint to decorate “joy” rocks, listened to Epiphany music, and ate delicious snacks and cupcakes provided by parents.

The event was a beautiful success, filled with laughter and joyful attention. Children and teens learned about the season and prepared themselves to lead a special service.

Sunday, January 4, brought everything together as all ages (youth and elementary) led the service as one. In a series of vignettes, portrayed between the verses of *It Came Upon a Midnight High*, the children and youth helped us imagine the modern wonder of “following a star and a child.” The vignettes began with students in an astronomy class, then in a local soup kitchen, and finally on a mission trip. Each group faced confusion, exhaustion, and the experience of being lost, but eventually trusted that they were being led to something beautiful where they were invited to bring whatever “gifts” they had. Finally, the group found their way to the manger, weaving the ancient story into our modern times.

Both the camp and the service brought generations together into an imaginative story and left us excited to think about future events to come.





JANUARY SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

Suellen Myers, Clerk of Session

Session met on January 8, 2026, and a quorum was declared.

Pastor Gusti gave an overview of the training sessions she held with those who will be ordained as Deacon or Ruling Elder. Carol Arnold, Tim Artlip, Keith Loudermill, Connie Ross, and Julie Slonaker were presented to Session, gave general background information and answered questions such as how they came to SPC, and why they agreed when they were asked to serve. All were **approved** for ordination with a motion from Dave Smith and a second from Suellen Myers.

Budget/Finance reported that we ended the year with a surplus that can be carried over into 2026 and get us closer to the 2026 budget goal.

Updated Partner Agreement with Rolling Ridge was presented. This updated agreement brings us in line with the other partner agreements and makes the Rolling Ridge accounting process easier. Motion by Dave Smith to approve, seconded by Anne Teresa. **Approved.**

Moderator – Ordained Leader Training for new and returning deacons and ruling elders took place on December 6, 28, and January 4.

Purge and Play continues with the office reconfiguration. Christa will now work from the inner office while Lynn will be in the outer.

Looking ahead to the 2026-2027 program, Pastor Gusti is planning two special studies. The first is to hold a 9-month, twice a month study of *Manna and Mercy*, the 100 page synopsis of the Bible. The second is to host an 8-month, once a month Dream Tending as Spiritual Practice.

Pastor Gusti has received a request to lead some form of study/conversation on personal finances and giving to the church. She has a four week “Faith and Money” course that she could adapt to SPC if there is interest.

In planning for worship for the next year, she would like to devote an entire program year of preaching exclusively on Mark’s Gospel referencing “Binding the Strong Man” by Ched Myers. The thesis of this book is that Mark’s Gospel is a manifesto for radical discipleship in the face of tyrannical/autocratic/imperial power.

Session approved holding a prayer vigil, open to the community, on January 13.

Deacons – Thanksgiving and Christmas cards were sent to everyone on the Young Adult Ministry list and care packages will be sent in February. The service of Chris Morehouse was celebrated as his term as a deacon ends at the end of January. During Gusti’s sabbatical the Deacons will be using the book, *Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom* by John O’Donahue.

Adult Education - Spring discussions are titled “Remember Who You Are.” The series begins February 1 with Gusti discussing her sabbatical and its significance to her.

Worship -A Celebration of Life service was held for Elise Woods on December 27. Services continue to be well attended with visitors most Sundays. The service on December 21 was so well attended that we ran out of communion juice.

Clerk – Communion was served December 25 and January 4 as previously approved. Session approved the serving of Communion on both February 1 and 22.

The minutes of the December meeting of Session were approved as presented. There will be a called meeting of Session on January 24.

The next stated meeting of Session will be February 12.

The meeting was closed with prayer and adjourned at 8:45pm.

The SPC Session meets the 2nd Thursday of the month from 7-9 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall and via Zoom. Meetings are open to any member of the congregation who wishes to attend. Contact Suellen Myers, Clerk of Session, to learn more.



SPC SOLAR PANELS PULLING THEIR LOAD

**By Kay Schultz and Emily Gross
Work in the World/EarthCare**

As we continue to tuck in and rest this winter and anticipate the return of longer, warmer days, our Earth Care folks are recalling the celebration, the enthusiasm and the excitement of 2014 as 60 solar panels were installed on the church roof to supply nearly half of the church's anticipated electricity demand. Miraculously, the project was financed creatively without any church contribution. Instead, more than 85 households participated in crowdsourced fundraising through a water heater project. Private individual water heaters were electronically prevented from pulling power from the grid during peak demand periods, thus saving the utility and earning cash contributions dedicated to financing the SPC solar project.

As 2026 begins, we would like to update you on the sun's impact. Our SPC solar panels have produced over 208 MWh since the installation in September 2014. That is enough solar energy to power 20,000 US homes for one hour and a cost equivalent of ~ \$24,000 on the Potomac Edison market. SPC has avoided approximately \$24,000 in energy costs!

The panels are producing well and we have been free from technical problems or breakages! Yeah!! Quite a gift to celebrate!

SPC'S FINANCIAL HEALTH REPORT

Dave Smith, Budget and Finance

Building the Future Together

As we close out the year, we celebrate a season of generosity and God's provision. SPC ends the year on solid financial footing, a testament to the generosity and faithfulness of our community. Although we began 2025 anticipating a budget deficit, the faithful giving of our congregation—along with several major gifts—allowed us not only to meet our needs but to finish with a surplus. This surplus positions us well as we prepare for 2026, helping us bridge the projected gap in next year's budget.

Our balance sheet continues to reflect strong stewardship, with unrestricted reserves exceeding six months of operating expenses, fully aligned with the Session's financial policy. This stability is a testament to the care, commitment, and shared vision of our church community.

The Session is now prayerfully reviewing and finalizing the 2026 budget. Approximately 63% of next year's expenses are already set through the congregation's approval of the pastor's terms of call and the Session's adoption of staff funding recommended by the Personnel Committee. As always, our budget includes a 10% tithe dedicated to Work in the World, reflecting SPC's ongoing commitment to serving others. The Session will complete the budget at a special meeting on January 24.

Stewardship Update:

By the end of 2025, there were **84 pledges** to the operating fund totaling **\$280,556** and an additional **40 pledges** to the building fund totaling **\$39,274**. The operating fund pledges are 94% of this year's goal of \$298,000—an encouraging sign of the congregation's dedication and trust in our shared ministry.

If you have not yet made a pledge, we invite you to participate in whatever way you are able. Every pledge, no matter the size, strengthens our ability to plan faithfully and boldly for the year ahead.

Your commitments form the foundation of our ministry. They sustain our worship, support our staff, care for our building, and empower SPC's mission within our community and beyond. Together, we are building a vibrant, welcoming, and hope-filled future for all who call SPC home.

BUDGET AT A GLANCE THROUGH DECEMBER 31, 2025

Income and Expenses	2025 Budget (12 Months)	Actuals* through December 31	Actuals as % of the 12-Month Budget
Operating Income	\$395,104	\$437,080	110%
Operating Expenses	\$393,619	\$397,944	101%

** Actuals include major gifts*

The surplus for the year will carry forward into 2026, helping to narrow the projected budget gap and strengthen our financial foundation. This stability enables SPC to move confidently into the year ahead, sustaining our ministries, supporting our mission, and nurturing the vibrant community we share.



DEACON TEAM UPDATE

Donna Dettling, Deacon Moderator

What a joy it is to expand the deacon team this year to 18 deacons plus our deacon for the animals! We welcomed the new deacons to our January 3 meeting so they could meet us all and get a feel for our monthly gatherings. We did introductions around the room and learned more about each other. We also **celebrated the deacon ministry of**

Chris Morehouse, whose term is ending. He will step away for at least a year, as required, and we will miss his kind spirit and thoughtful insights. When you see Chris, please thank him for his years of devoted care!

With these changes, **some deacon flocks will be redistributed and others adjusted to more equitably share the care of the congregation.** Our goal is for this to happen seamlessly, and with an introduction from your new deacon, or a confirmation that you will continue with your current deacon. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at (301) 467-0423 or donna.dettling@gmail.com.

Desiring a more defined flock transition process, we welcomed our spiritual development work on that topic, led by Pastor Gusti. We reflected on the transfer of power from Moses to Joshua in Numbers 27:15-23 as a basis to discuss our upcoming transfer of flock members from one deacon to another. We considered steps for developing a process that honors the previous deacon, informs the new deacon, and ensures transfers happen in a caring and well communicated manner. We will continue to define the handoff steps at our next meeting.

Please watch for more information about these deacon ministries: **The Young Adult Ministry** will be collecting items for **Valentine's Day care packages** to those we are supporting. **The Sustained Care Ministry** is **seeking interested volunteers** from the congregation to form a support team for our more vulnerable members (those with long-term medical, mobility, or other challenges) by providing on-going contact (calls and visits), home communion, and other support beyond what a deacon might handle on their own. **The Workshops and Educational Events Ministry** is organizing an event on Sunday, April 12, 2026, after church **for Autism Acceptance Month**. We plan to have a professional speaker on the subject, along with a panel of members who have experience with autism. The goal is to educate and provide resources to attendees. For more information about SPC's Community of Care, go to the SPC website <https://shepherdstownpresbyterian.org/connect-engage/community-of-care/>

Throughout Gusti's sabbatical, we will do a book study on *Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom*, by John O'Donohue to examine themes such as friendship, belonging, and the natural rhythm within us.

We invite everyone to cultivate a relationship with their deacon, as a way to encourage community and care throughout our congregation. It means a lot to each deacon to know that you receive our communications, whether or not you choose to be in close contact. And it will enhance your connection with the church to know who you can turn to in times of need or celebration. We are here for you, and we hope you may find comfort in that knowledge.

PrayerNet

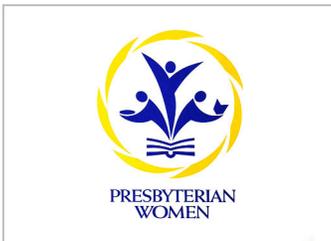
Please send your prayer requests to prayernet@shepherdstownpresbyterian.org. You may also call the church office at 304-876-6466 during office hours (Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. - 2 p.m.) or request the prayer through the SPC website at [Community of Care | Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church](#). A couple of practical reminders as you make your requests:

1. Please make sure the person for whom you are requesting prayer has given their permission. Due to privacy considerations, we are unable to share requests without that permission.
2. Please indicate whether or not you would like this request to be shared in worship.
3. 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), or volunteer as one of the PrayerNet administrators, 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 Presbyterian Women's Group meeting on January 8 was filled with conversation and food! Fifteen of us joined in person as Elaine Hurd led the lively discussion on Chapter 5 – "Listen," in our book ***See No Stranger: A Memoir and Manifesto of Revolutionary Love***, by Valarie Kaur. The author

states that the purpose of listening across lines of difference is not agreement or compromise, ***it is understanding***. Can we rephrase what was said, listen for places we agree, and possibly bridge the gap? We discussed that there are no monsters, only those who are wounded. But how do we learn to be compassionate when what they say and do is in such opposition to our beliefs, or when they are causing harm? These are difficult topics and our conversation was broad and deep.

Many thanks to everyone who contributed to our collection for **Bethany House shelter in Martinsburg**. Their needs are ongoing as they support women and children who are unhoused or leaving dangerous situations. They are always grateful for our support, and happily received the load of linens and cleaning products that were delivered.

Our next **Mid-week Manna Meal at the Community Cup in Martinsburg will be on Wednesday, February 18**. Members of the women's group provide much of the food, and the Eastern Panhandle Youth Alliance assists with serving, but we invite the congregation to participate in this bi-monthly effort to feed those who struggle to have enough. The link to the Manna Meal sign-up will be in the E-News.

We ended our meeting with **our annual soup and bread meal**, which included four delicious soups and four types of bread, along with cookies for dessert! Most of us happily taste-tested multiple varieties of each, while we engaged in fellowship with one another.

Our next meeting will be on Thursday, February 5, at 10:00 a.m. in the Fellowship Hall and on Zoom. Please read Part 2 - Chapter 6 – "Reimagine" in the book *See No Stranger*. We love to welcome visitors and new members, and hope you will give the group a try!



Photo from Mid-week Manna Meal in November 2025