



THE MESSENGER

January 2026

Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church
Shepherdstownpresbyterian.org

PASTOR'S NOTE: Sabbath as Practice

Dear friends,

Through the long nights of Advent and the shimmering hope of Christmastide mystery of The Great Sabbath, not merely as rest but as Incarnation: love made flesh, peace born in paradox, divine presence dwelling in us and among us.

As the year turns, so too does our focus: Sabbath as Practice. Not simply thinking about Sabbath, but *living it*. Not simply pausing for breath, but *learning to breathe differently*. Not simply waiting for a day of rest, but *crafting a rhythm where rest is always welcome*.

In our worship this month, we practice the rhythm of Sabbath together:

- With our children and youth as Sabbath Shines Forth on Epiphany Sunday (January 4)
- With a baptismal blessing of *belovedness* (January 11)
- With a recommitment to justice on Racial Justice Sunday (January 18)
- With a celebration of shared leadership and community as we ordain and install new leaders (January 25)

On January 18, I will also host a conversation between services on “A Theological Frame for Our Time,” offering wisdom from our tradition and our Scriptures for facing injustice and speaking truth to power.

Each movement brings us closer to a threshold: **My sabbatical begins in earnest February 15**. In this final full month before I step away for rest and reflection, my heart is full with gratitude for all we have created together these past six years. I am also filled with enthusiasm for what the future will hold.

Let January be gentle with us. Let us practice refuge, resilience, resistance, and reimagining together — one breath at a time.

With you on the journey,
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

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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

The Great Sabbath:
Reflections for Our Seventh Year
Autumn: Sabbath As Disruption
Advent: Sabbath As Incarnation
Christmastide: Sabbath As Fulfillment
Baptism Sunday and Beyond: Sabbath As Practice

Sabbath in Scripture is God's gift of freedom, justice, and healing —
a holy interruption of endless striving and its harmful consequences.
At Epiphany, we discover the heartbeat of Sabbath in the coming of Christ.
Through January we commit to practicing Sabbath in Community.

Sunday, January 4 **Sabbath Shines Forth: Children & Youth Share the Story** Matthew 2:1-12
Epiphany Sunday
Communion
No 8:30am Service
No Sunday Studio

There, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen ...

Sunday, January 11 **Sabbath as Practice: Belovedness** Luke 3:21-22
Baptism Sunday
Litany of Baptismal Blessing

"You are my Beloved Child: with you I am well pleased"

Sunday, January 18 **Sabbath as Practice: Justice** 1 Corinthians 1:1-9
Second Sunday of Ordinary Time
MLK Weekend/Racial Justice Sunday

You were called into the partnership of ... Jesus

Sunday, January 25 **Sabbath as Practice: Shared Leadership** 1 Corinthians 1:10-17
Third Sunday of Ordinary Time
Ordination and Installation of Leaders

Be knit together ... in the same purpose



CHILDREN AND YOUTH UPDATE

Christa Mastrangelo Joyce
Director of Children and Youth Formation

This season in our Children and Youth ministry we've focused on "Sharing the Good News." From weekly reflections which allowed both youth and children to write their own speech bubbles of "good news" in their life, to making decorative star ornaments with a "prayer" of what they're hoping for, the groups have been exuberant with the message of Good News to come.

With so much to feel heartache for and heartbroken over, the children and youth have reminded me of the "yes, and" of life this past month. I have been particularly grateful for their enthusiasm and joy during this Advent season and have been reminded again why this ministry is so fun.

After a month of thinking forward to the Good News of the Christmas message and the good news in their lives, we celebrated with our annual Christmas parties. Each group played a series of games, including a "snow ball battle" and a blindfolded scoop the Christmas bows relay. Truly, we ate, drank, and were merry as we celebrated our friendship and excitement for the season together. Our finale for the month was wrapping gifts for one of the children whose family was adopted this Christmas by SPC's Immigrant and Refugee Support Committee. So, we end the month and year by sharing the good news into the world at large.





DECEMBER SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

Suellen Myers, Clerk of Session

Session met on December 11 and a quorum was declared.

Discussion of the letters of the Chicago Clergy, Catholic Bishops, and Shepherdstown Quaker Meeting resulted in proposing an educational event based on an explanation and discussion of their theological framework. This will possibly take place on the weekend of Martin Luther King Day.

Personnel - The committee proposed a 3.5% increase for all staff as well as continuing education, guest musicians, benefit costs, etc. Also included was a proposal to support Christa Mastrangelo Joyce's attendance at the annual meeting of the Association of Partners in Christian Education to be held in Pittsburgh in the spring. She will also be attending a course for her certification. The Committee's proposal was **approved**.

Finance – Pledging continues on track while general giving is ahead of expectations.

Draft Budget – A draft budget was presented to Session for discussion and questions. A final budget for 2026 will be voted on in January.

Moderator – Sabbatical planning continues with Mary Jane Hitt having begun her Parish Associate contract.

Bible at the Bar met at SPC to discuss the book *Christ in the Rubble*. The final Bible at the Bar before Sabbatical will be on February 5.

Pastor Gusti participated in the Candlelight Vigil in support of immigrants, Wednesday, December 10 in Charles Town.

Adult Education – Next semester Sunday Seminars will focus on the topic of fostering more community by getting to know one another better.

Clerk – Communion was served on November 30, December 7, and will be served all Sundays in Advent. On a motion by Suellen Myers, seconded by Emily Gross, the serving of communion on January 4 was **approved**. The minutes of the November meeting of Session were **approved** on a motion by Anne Teresa, seconded by Keri Mahoney.

The meeting was closed with prayer and adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

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'S FINANCIAL HEALTH REPORT

Dave Smith, Budget and Finance

Stewardship Season is Here, Budgeting is Around the Corner

Let's Build the Future Together

As we enter this season of reflection and gratitude, we invite you to join us in shaping SPC's mission for 2026. Your pledges are the foundation upon which we build our annual budget. They allow us to plan with confidence, sustain our ministries, support our dedicated staff, care for our sacred space, and extend SPC's impact far beyond our walls.

SPC's budget process is around the corner. Here are the steps of the process:

- The pastor's terms of call for 2026 were presented and approved at the Congregational Meeting on November 16.
- The session also approved the personnel committee's recommended staff funding for 2026.
- The session will review a draft budget at their regular meeting on the second Thursday in January, and will finalize the 2026 budget at a special meeting on January 24.

Your pledge makes all this possible. Every pledge is a promise—a promise that SPC will continue to be a place of worship, service, and community. Whether it's your first time pledging or you've been a faithful supporter for years, your gift matters deeply.

Please pledge what you can. Together, we can ensure SPC remains a vibrant and welcoming spiritual home for all.

Stewardship Update:

- As of mid-December, 82 have pledged to the Operating Fund totaling approximately \$265,556, and 37 have pledged to the Building Fund totaling approximately \$37,474. Pledges are 89% of \$298,000, which is this year's fundraising goal - 5% above last year's operating fund goal. While substantial funds still need to be raised, we are on a pace comparable to last year's stewardship campaign.

BUDGET AT A GLANCE THROUGH NOVEMBER 30, 2025

Income and Expenses	2025 Budget (12 Months)	Actuals* through November 30	Actuals as % of the 12-Month Budget
Operating Income	\$395,104	\$398,284	101%
Operating Expenses	\$393,619	\$364,866	93%

** Actuals include major gifts*

The surplus for the year can be carried over into next year to reduce the projected gap in the 2026 budget. This financial health allows us to continue our mission and ministries.

SABBATICAL TEAM UPDATE

Outcomes from two Sabbatical Planning Retreats last summer and fall are beginning to take shape. **Three opportunities for greater connection and reflection** will be happening in the next few weeks. Please update your calendar!!

SPC Game Night! If you missed the December 30 event, stay tuned to Facebook, E-News, and the SPC website for Game Night in January!

This multi-generational evening will feature games of Pictionary and Win, Lose, or Draw, and everyone is welcome to attend!

Please bring a snack to share, and join in the fun!

Listening Sessions Overview – Saturday, January 3, 12:30 – 2:00 pm – Fellowship Hall

Keith Loudermill will lead an informational meeting about our 2026 small group Listening Sessions, to answer questions about what to expect during the sessions, and discuss the process for leading a small group. Lunch will be provided. We hope you'll attend! **RSVP to Jen Jones at jenajones44@gmail.com or (681) 247-0193.**

SPC Timeline Project Kick-Off Meeting – Sunday, January 11, 12:30 pm – Sanctuary

All are welcome to join us to imagine how a unique timeline of SPC's history could come alive in our sanctuary. It might include the depiction of eras in the church's life, special memories of everyone in the congregation, and perhaps a glimpse into a vision for the future.

We hope historians, creatives, and anyone with interest will attend!



JOIN THE HANDBELL CHOIR

SPC's handbell choir came into existence in 2023. We are a small group of ringers who love ringing. We have been fortunate to "borrow" some ringers from New Street United Methodist Church for the last six months to enlarge our group, but we would welcome more ringers from SPC. No requirements are necessary; we will teach you how to ring.

After ringing once a month this fall and also during Advent and Christmas Eve, the group will be taking a break and starting back again in February 2026. Our practices are on Wednesday evenings at 6:30 p.m. Please consider joining our group. If interested, please contact director Sheila Melendez at sheilamelendez@shepherdstownpresbyterian.org.



DEACON

DEACON TEAM UPDATE

Donna Dettling, Deacon Moderator

In place of our regular monthly meeting, the Deacon Team had a holiday potluck brunch celebration on Saturday, December 13, at the Dettling's home. A fantastic time was had by all, as we enjoyed the delicious spread of food, beverages, and desserts, and had a rousing white elephant gift exchange! We collected donations for Shepherdstown Shares totaling \$200, and had a really special time of friendship and gratitude together.



Although our service to the congregation never ceases, we will get back to business after the holidays at our January 3 meeting, when we welcome the new deacons and discuss the transition of flock members. We hope everyone had a wonderful Christmas, and hold in prayer those who are facing challenges.

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:

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

At the December 4 Presbyterian Women's Group meeting, nine of us joined in person and on Zoom and wore holiday headbands and hats in celebration.

Donna led the discussion on Chapter 4 – Rage - in our book ***See No Stranger: A Memoir and Manifesto of Revolutionary Love***, by Valarie Kaur. We began with a video of the author from an October speech she delivered about the concerning state of the country, and particularly the impact of administration actions against the immigrant community. Her words were powerful, and delivered with her usual eloquence and force. It stirred us all into much conversation and led easily into this chapter and her encouragement to process our anger and rage into safe containers (weeping, venting, writing, art, music, meditation, etc.) in order to begin to heal from our traumas.



Our November **collection of the National Presbyterian Women's Thank Offering totaled \$770**, which was sent to the national organization for distribution to the charity organizations they designated. Our group is very generous and caring, and we thank everyone who gave.

Throughout January, we will be collecting items for the **Bethany House shelter for women and children in Martinsburg**, and welcome help from the congregation in this effort. Their needs are: twin bedding (sheet sets, blankets, pillows, mattress covers), towels and wash cloths, laundry detergent, paper towels, toilet paper, and Walmart gift cards. **There will be a collection box in the Fellowship Hall and we encourage you to give generously to support this much needed shelter.**

We hope you will join us for our next meeting on January 8 at 10:00 a.m., which will include our annual soup and bread lunch. Please read Part 2 - Chapter 5 – 'Listen' in the book *See No Stranger*. The conversation and fellowship are impactful and supportive. Feel free to bring a friend!



The Adult Education team invites everyone in the SPC community to help fulfill one of both Adult Education and the Sabbatical team's spring semester goals - to foster more community by getting to know one another better. We will be sharing our journeys and stories during Sunday Seminars using the panel format to take the pressure off any one individual. We plan to begin the seminars on February 1.

Sign-up sheets with proposed panel topics and questions will be posted in the Fellowship Hall. Feel free to show your interest in sitting on one or more panels by signing up and noting any dates you know you will be unavailable. We will do our best to create a schedule including all who've signed up. The idea is to have at least three panelists each Sunday share reflections based on the predetermined questions we've compiled for each scheduled topic. Attendees observing the panel discussions will also be encouraged to ask questions.

We're proposing (in no particular order) the following panels:

- **Long-time Members**
- **New Members**
- **Passion Projects**
- **Roads Less Traveled**
- **Spiritual Journeys**
- **Spiritual Practices**
- **"Awe"-some Experiences**
- **Transformative Books**
- **Life's Big Questions**

As you can see, Sunday Seminars have a lot in store for our spring semester. While we hope you will consider signing up to sit on one or more panels, if you prefer to just drop in, sit, and listen, we welcome that, too! Topics will be announced in the weekly E-news. If you have any questions, please contact Anne Teresa at ateresa@comcast.net.



OUR FEATHERED FRIENDS

by Carol Wood, Deacon for the Animals

As we move into colder temperatures and shorter daylight, one of my "giving back" to Mother Earth favorites is feeding the variety of birds in my yard. I hang my feeders out around the end of October as nature's food source begins to dwindle. I provide high energy feed such as black oil sunflower seeds, peanuts and suet cakes. Birds with smaller beaks, like finches, enjoy Niger seeds hung in mesh pouches. Once I make the commitment to feed our feathered neighbors, I make sure the food supply is always available to them.

As I watch the show of the different bird varieties feeding, I wonder how those little bodies stay warm? Some shiver, like the Carolina Chickadee, burning energy to stay warm. Others fluff their feathers, trapping pockets of air in the hollow quills of the feathers covering their bodies. Still others, like Tree Swallows, cuddle and roost together gathering body heat from one another.

As winter temperatures continue to dip, I am gifted with winged visitors stopping by my backyard offerings and I feel satisfied, knowing I am helping our feathered friends make it through this frigid season of winter.

HEALING MINDS, HEARTS AND LIVES

ANAR Helping Palestinian Children

By Pat Hamilton

On September 27, a number of SPC members and friends attended a luncheon at Alfredo's Mediterranean Grill in Charles Town as part of a fundraiser and educational presentation on behalf of Palestinian children. The pictures of children, the speakers, and images of a child's world in Gaza all left impressions difficult to erase. Nor should they be.

Getting help of any kind to Gaza is challenging, but Healing to Hope manages to embrace that challenge with its support of Anar, a Palestinian, non-profit in Gaza that directly supports children. Healing to Hope promotes the emotional and psychological healing of Palestinian children and caregivers impacted by violence and oppression. They do this, in part, by raising awareness about and supporting the work of [Anar](#) in Bethlehem.

As a US-based organization, Healing to Hope shares Anar's vision to advance the well-being and resilience of Palestinian children, youth, and caregivers through meaningful psychosocial support and arts-based healing as forms of collective resilience. From its base in Palestine, Anar works to break the cycle of intergenerational trauma and build community.

And yet, one wonders how this could possibly be achieved in the environment the children are living in today. These three programs are rich and impactful—and provide direct support.

Community Based Psychosocial Support Program enhances the coping mechanisms of a community to be a hub of self-help to provide immediate assistance to children and caregiving.

Shabeek, Children and Youth Mentorship Program takes the empowerment right to the children themselves, helping children and youth aged 15–29 develop leadership and life skills along with community development, mobilization and advocacy. Building leaders is essential to continuing the work.

The Makan Program is designed to facilitate healing through play, creative and artistic adventures which allow for self-expression. Children explore art, theatre and dance as tools for reflection and expression. "Makan" means place or space in Arabic.

At SPC, we have been engaging in a variety of activities to learn more about Palestine, the children in Gaza and what more individuals can do. Fay Stump who is a coordinator for TEAM (Together Educating and Advocating for Peace in the Middle East), encourages us to read and attend the book events they are organizing.

How can you learn more and help? Go to TEAM's Facebook page and sign up for their mailing list and join in readings of recommended books. <https://www.facebook.com/EPTEAMWV>



From the luncheon we have permission to share [Nina Bazouzi Cullers' Nakba narrative](#) presented to us. It's not a professional recording--but it gives a glimpse of what she writes about in her memoir *Living through the Nakba: Tales of a Palestinian Youth*. We are hoping to have copies of her book for sale locally soon.



On December 4, Pastor Gusti was part of a discussion group at SPC for the book *Christ in the Rubble*.

CHRISTMAS MADE MERRY

By Rie Wilson



Thanks to the generosity of many SPC members and friends, plus friends of friends, we provided over 110 gifts and food to ten people in our immigrant community. Siri McDonald, a school counselor, identified three families, and we were able to spread some ease and joy to them this season. Thank you, Siri, for your amazing coordination.

Eight of us gathered on December 14 to wrap...and wrap...and wrap. Here are **Santa's** bags full of gifts, plus two bicycles! We also were able to provide two beds for one of the families.



*Susan Lovell **lovingly** made quilts for each person. What a magical gift.*

Earlier that same day, SPC's Sunday Studio youth ages 6 and up helped with wrapping for one child, astounding Siri and Christa with their enthusiasm and wrapping skills. Some words they used to describe this act of service were: "fun, grateful, exciting, and tricky to wrap!" Gabriel Madeira said, "I loved the exercise!" as he was our runner for supplies.

One of the moms receiving the gifts was so thrilled about the bike for her son and was tearful at getting all the clothing and supplies for the children. Another parent said, "I didn't have anything for my son; he will be so happy and surprised." One other mother was noticeably relieved by the delivery. The older son was also excited and shared some news on several personal accomplishments that were huge for him. All the children have been supported by counselors and school staff on their growth in both school and life. They have worked hard and thrived despite significant pressure on them due to both not speaking much, if any, English as well as having family challenges related to immigration.

This is the 4th year the Immigrant and Refugee Support Committee has managed this project. We love doing it. Thank you all for your hearts and time and talent in spreading Christmas joy.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT SPC'S ONLINE SUNDAY SERVICE

NEW LINK TO SERVICE

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/5615513631?pwd=tijPWL3g7qLh36WOVjdPxr6Fj6am8N.1>

GOOD NEWS!

SPC has transitioned to Zoom to improve the streaming experience for the 11 a.m. Sunday service and special events. Here are simple instructions about how to find the new link and then enjoy the service. If you have comments or some helpful feedback, please email CommSPC24@gmail.com

OTHER PLACES TO FIND THE LINK TO JOIN THE WORSHIP SERVICE ON ZOOM

- ☐ **SPC Website** <https://shepherdstownpresbyterian.org/>
- ☐ **Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/spcworks> The streaming link is pinned to the top of the SPC Facebook page.
- ☐ **E-News** mailed weekly to members and friends

HOW TO JOIN THE WORSHIP SERVICE ON ZOOM

Please follow these simple steps when joining our new Ecamm livestream on Zoom!

- ☐ **Join the Zoom meeting**
 - o Click the new worship service Zoom link
- ☐ **Mute your microphone**
 - o Please click **Mute** (microphone icon)
 - o This helps keep audio clear for everyone
- ☐ **Click on the link below and watch!**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/5615513631?pwd=tijPWL3g7qLh36WOVjdPxr6Fj6am8N.1>

TO ENHANCE YOUR VIEWING EXPERIENCE *YOU DON'T NEED TO MAKE THESE ADJUSTMENTS FOR SIMPLE VIEWING*

- **Choose “Speaker View”**
 - In the top-right corner of Zoom, select **Speaker View**.
 - This ensures the sanctuary video is the main thing you see.
- **Hide other participants**
 - Hover over any participant video tile.
 - Click the **three dots (...)** in the corner of the tile.
 - Select **“Hide Non-Video Participants”**.
 - This removes screens that do not have cameras on.
- **Pin the Sanctuary View (if needed)**
 - Hover over the video showing the sanctuary.
 - Click the **three dots (...)**.
 - Choose **“Pin”**.
 - The sanctuary will remain full-screen for you.
- **Optional: Hide Self View**
 - If you'd rather not see your own tile:
 - Click ... on your own tile and choose **“Hide Self View”**

Don't forget if you miss the live stream, you can always go to the SPC website under **Sermons and Bulletins** to watch it later!

<https://shepherdstownpresbyterian.org/sundays/sermons-and-bulletins/>