



THE MESSENGER

March 2026

Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church
Shepherdstownpresbyterian.org

PASTOR'S NOTE

I am writing this note the day after we blessed Pastor Gusti and sent her on her way for a time of rest, reflection, and renewal. So it's just us now - you and me, getting to know one another as we continue the work of the SPC congregation. As we acknowledged in worship yesterday when we ordained and installed church officers, Christ's work in and among us is not dependent on any one person. We share leadership with one another, acknowledging that in our baptism we all are called to ministry.

In the month or so that I have been living among you, I have been moved by your kindness and generosity – by your willingness to help me learn the ropes – by your gentle reminders of things I either don't know or have forgotten. I have every confidence that together we will not only survive but thrive in the months until Pastor Gusti's return in June.

The season of Lent is now upon us. For some, observing Lent means giving up something they enjoy. In Northeastern Pennsylvania where I served for a decade – a heavily Roman Catholic area – it was common for folks to deny themselves a pleasure such as chocolate or French fries or wine during Lent. Giving up tangible pleasures such as these can help one cultivate mindfulness, so if that's your practice, do it with resolve.

But my hunch is that the most important thing during Lent is not what we give up, but what we choose to take on. What better time is there to renew our commitment to serving those in need? Or reaching out to those from whom we are estranged? Or setting aside daily time for prayer and meditation? Or reflecting on our spiritual journey in a journal?

However you observe it, may this Lent be for us all a time of reflection and renewal as we walk the road to Jerusalem with Jesus.

Pastor Mary Jane

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. Mary Jane Hitt (she/her), Sabbatical Pastor

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

Lynn Dampman (she/her), Administrative Assistant

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

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 Mary Jane: Pastor Mary Jane makes every effort to respond to communications as soon as possible between the hours of 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. Saturday through Thursday. Fridays are her Sabbath. If you are having a pastoral emergency, please call any time, day or night, 304-712-8700; maryjane@shepherdstownpresbyterian.org

Worship at SPC

March 2026

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, as you can see in the sermon titles below. This Lent, we're trusting that God shows up in shades of gray, rainbow hues, and everywhere in between.

Sunday, March 1

Between Faith & Works

Luke 10:38-42

Second Sunday in Lent
Communion

Sunday, March 8

Between Rest & Growth

Luke 13:6-9

Third Sunday in Lent
Communion

Sunday, March 15

Between Lost & Found

Luke 15:1-7

Fourth Sunday in Lent
Communion

Wednesday, March 22

Between Righteousness & Mercy

Luke 19:1-10

Fifth Sunday in Lent
Communion

Sunday, March 29

Between Shouting & Silence

Luke 19:29-40

Palm/Passion Sunday



FEBRUARY SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

Suellen Myers, Clerk of Session

Session met on February 12 at 7:00 pm and a quorum was declared.

The meeting opened with prayer and continued with a discussion of “A Theological Framework for our Time.” Session approved putting the document on our website.

Session approved a request to shift Professional Expenses to Pastor’s Discretionary Fund.

There was a request to allow use of the sanctuary for a musical class on protest music and songs.

Session approved the use of space and sponsoring the event. The date is to be decided.

Work in the World Team update was provided by Lynn Coddington. We are continuing the Bluefields Nicaragua Partnership and VERBO Scholarship support this year. The student we’re supporting is training in the agricultural field. Also under Justice and Peace, our Immigrant and Refugee Support team recently supported and promoted Pastor Gusti’s online presentation about her experiences in Minneapolis. We are also focusing on the urgent financial needs of Mountain State Justice which is overwhelmed providing legal assistance to the immigrant community throughout the state. Under **Earth Care**, we support West Virginia Rivers in their efforts to educate the public about protecting water resources. Emily Gross has completed and submitted the paperwork for SPC to continue as an Earth Care Congregation. We also now support the Jefferson County Foundation and its work educating Eastern Panhandle residents about the impact of data centers. Water bottling plants and new residential development are on SPC’s Earth Care radar. Outreach and information about opportunities for the congregation to participate in activities and events will appear in all SPC communication channels.

Moderator’s Report – Pastor Gusti is thrilled with where the church is right now. She requested that her correspondence with Bronwen Boswell (General Presbyter and Stated Clerk of our Presbytery) around Wisdom Witness in Minneapolis be entered into the minutes and included as an attachment. **Approved.** The request that SPC co-sponsor the Palestine Film Festival was **approved.**

Clerk – Communion was served February 1 and will be served February 22 as previously approved. **Session approved** the minutes of the January meeting of Session as well as the minutes of Called Meetings on January 18 and January 24. Also **approved** were 2026 dates for the serving of Communion. The annual statistical report was **approved.** The next stated meeting will be March 12.

In a ritual of Transition, Pastor Gusti passed the gavel to Rev. Mary Jane Hitt.

After a closing prayer by Pastor Mary Jane, the meeting was adjourned at 8:22 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

The Finance Committee met to review January's financial reports and discuss ways to strengthen communication about Budget & Finance throughout the year.

The committee noted that pledge giving is tracking as expected. General giving, while slightly below projections, remains within a manageable range for this early in the year. The committee also reviewed several expenses, including Gusti's trip to Minneapolis and Christa's upcoming conference.

Ways to give to SPC:

- In the offering plate during worship
- By mail - Make checks payable to Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church and mail to: PO Box 268, Shepherdstown, WV 25443
- Online - If you would like to make an online donation, please go to: www.shepherdstownpresbyterian.org and use the GIVE icon in the upper right on the home page or use the QR code. You may donate through PayPal, debit or credit card.



Finally, the committee affirmed the importance of documenting the annual budget process and improving year-round communication with the congregation about budget, financial updates, and stewardship priorities.

BUDGET AT A GLANCE THROUGH JANUARY 31, 2026

Income and Expenses	2026 Budget (12 Months)	Actuals* through January 31	Actuals as % of the 12-Month Budget
Operating Income	\$358,589	\$61,300	17%
Operating Expenses	\$397,841	\$37,431	10%

* Actuals include major gifts

SABBATICAL CONNECTION AND REFLECTION OPPORTUNITIES

HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?

The Sabbatical Planning Team reminds our beloved SPC community of three opportunities for greater connection to one another, deep reflection, and fun. These three opportunities are outcomes from the summer and fall retreats in which many of you participated.

- **Greater Connection** - Connect with members and friends of SPC through Listening Sessions and Adult Education Panel Interviews.
- **Deeper Reflection** - Join the SPC Timeline Project to gain a deeper understanding of SPC's roots, and the people and events that came before us.
- **Fun!** - Join others to enjoy games, trivia, snacks and an overall lightness. In dark times, it's good to connect with each other to bring fun and laughter to life.

CONNECTION

Listening Sessions

Over the next six months, we will engage in intentional Listening Sessions held every other week. These gatherings are designed to create intentional communal space for connection and reflection and create an opportunity for us to grow, not only as individuals, but as a community rooted in shared purpose. We plan to host two groups. The first Listening Session group kicked off in late February at the home of Keith Loudermill. There will be another group beginning in the spring and we already have a few on the roster. ***We have 5 seats open – one is for you!*** Please contact Jen Jones jenajones44@gmail.com to register. The second session will take place every other week in the SPC library at a time to be determined.

Adult Education Interview Panels

The Adult Education team has invited everyone in the SPC community to help fulfill two of the outcomes from the Sabbatical planning sessions: to get to know one another better, and to mirror Gusti's Sabbatical by remembering who we are. The plan is to share our journeys and stories during Sunday Seminars using the panel format. Gusti kicked off the series by sharing her own Sabbatical thoughts on February 1.

Scheduled panels for March are:

- March 1 - Life's Big Questions (Part I)
- March 8 - Spiritual Practices
- March 15 - Life's Big Questions (Part II)
- March 22 - Life's Big Questions (Part III)
- March 29 - Roads Less Traveled

If you are interested in being a part of a panel, please see Missy Wheeler or Anne Teresa on Sunday mornings or contact Anne via email at ateresa@comcast.net

REFLECTION

SPC Timeline Project

Join the SPC Timeline Project to gain a deeper understanding of SPC's roots and honor the people and events that came before us. It will be filled with art and occasions, remembrance and dreams. You will be invited to add your own special memories to the timeline to establish and celebrate the importance of SPC in your life. Help us look to the future of SPC and envision our direction. All of this will come alive in the sanctuary throughout the sabbatical months and be ready for Gusti to add her timeline to ours when she returns. To learn more, contact Donna Dettling at donna.dettling@gmail.com

FUN!

What better way to support Pastor Gusti during her Sabbatical than our congregation continuing to grow together as a church family? In the coming months, we'll enjoy fun and meaningful opportunities to connect with one another—through game nights, potlucks, and shared entertaining experiences that strengthen our friendships and deepen our fellowship at SPC. Let's celebrate this season together and enjoy the gift of community! Stay tuned for additional information in *The Messenger* and the SPC E-News! If you have ideas for having fun together, please contact Keri Mahoney at keri.mahoney@gmail.com.

We hope you will consider participating in one or more of these ways.



DEACON TEAM UPDATE

Donna Dettling, Deacon Moderator

It was quite a blessing to have a full sanctuary as we ordained and installed our four new deacons: Carol Arnold, Connie Ross, Keith Loudermill and Tim Artlip, and installed the deacons who are renewing their terms: Donna Dettling, Mica Martin, Diana Eldridge, and Lynne Wiseman. The laying on of hands is always a powerful moment for both the leaders and the congregation. We hope you will get to know the new deacons and respond to their introductions if you are in their flocks!



Donna Dettling was reelected as the Deacon Moderator for 2026 at our meeting on February 7, and we enjoyed having our new group together along with Pastor Mary Jane. We look forward to a year of continued growth individually and as a team, as we strengthen our Share the Care model and our various deacon ministries.

You should have received an introductory email if you have a new deacon, or heard from your current deacon that they will continue to care for you. Please remember that while you are assigned to a specific deacon, you are welcome to reach out to any of us as needs arise. We will be updating our deacon brochure soon, to provide you with contact information, photos, and other details about the ministry of the deacons.



Our Young Adult Ministry sent Valentine's Day care packages to 24 young adults from the church. Each received snacks and treats, a note of encouragement, and a Valentine signed by many church members. Thank you for your contributions. The photos show the package contents, and Deacons Sherry Sykes, Susan Lovell, and Jennifer Jones preparing the care packages.



We hope that each of you knows who your deacon is, and will respond to them when they reach out periodically. We want there to be a strong sense of belonging and care across the congregation, as we build community and fellowship together.

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) 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 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 Mary Jane directly at (304) 712-8700. 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



We had an energetic and information-filled Presbyterian Women's Group meeting on February 5. Thank you to the 14 ladies who braved the cold to join us in person as Julie Slonaker led an in-depth discussion on Chapter 6 – "Reimagine," in our book ***See No Stranger: A Memoir and Manifesto of Revolutionary Love***, by Valarie Kaur. The author wrote about various ways the prison system has impacted her experiences, and we discussed how mass incarcerations create poverty and affect the nation's economy.

Our **Mid-week Manna Meal at the Community Cup in Martinsburg** was on Wednesday, February 18. Susan Lovell reports: "Thank you so much for the abundance of dishes for the guests of the Community Cup tonight. There were around 54, which is way more than they have ever had. I am so grateful that each one of you contributed. Many of you provided large quantities of the dish/dishes you brought, and it was needed. We had plenty of so many different foods that even those last in line had choices in the selections. After serving each person, we were able to provide seconds of many items in take-away boxes. The Eastern Panhandle Youth Alliance provided cheerful service, efficiently serving each guest's requested foods with kind greetings. Julie, Season and Kelley managed beverage service and interacted with the guests. There were so many compliments on the meal provided and expressions of appreciation for the quality and variety of foods offered. I want to share that with you."



We talked about Pastor Gusti's experiences in Minneapolis, and sent a \$100 check from our PW account to Westminster Presbyterian Church there, where Gusti knows one of the pastors from seminary. We asked that they use the funds to help support their work on the streets during this challenging time.

Our next meeting will be on Thursday, March 5, at 10:00 a.m. in the Fellowship Hall and on Zoom. Please read Part 3 - Chapter 7 – "Breathe" in the book *See No Stranger*. Whether or not you are reading the book, we invite you to join us for conversation that is always stimulating, along with prayer, food, and fellowship.



OUR WORK IN THE WORLD

This new column in *The Messenger* will contain news and highlights of SPC's outreach to the community and the world. Whether it's Justice and Peace, Earth Care, Systemic Poverty or Inclusion and Equity, find the latest here and be sure to contribute your thoughts about SPC's world in the world at CommSPC24@gmail.com

WHAT'S NEW AT WORK IN THE WORLD?

Beginning this year, the Mission, Social Justice, Matthew 25 and Earth Care committees are rolled up into a new, unified team. We've named this team approach **Our Work in the World** which tracks a path taken by the national PC(USA).

The team divided our work into four focus areas identified as **Justice and Peace**, **Earth Care**, **Systemic Poverty** and **Inclusion and Equity**. Here's what we're doing and our invitation to get involved!

Justice and Peace includes financial and material support and advocacy for our immigrant neighbors in Jefferson County who need our help now more than ever. We also sponsor a **Guns to Gardens** ministry – happening this May -- that turns unwanted guns into garden tools and art. Financial support for a university student's scholarship and a church community in **Bluefields, Nicaragua** is ongoing and both received our funds in late February. Support for a Palestinian relief organization – **ANAR** – that treats children traumatized by the ongoing conflict has been added to our list of beneficiaries.

Earth Care advocacy is underway right now. SPC is supporting **West Virginia Rivers** as it tackles educating the state legislature about the need to protect critical water resources. Our dollars and volunteers are also supporting the **Jefferson County Foundation** which is doggedly highlighting the impact of data centers, water bottling plants and residential development in the Eastern Panhandle.

Systemic Poverty. Changing embedded systems that cause food insecurity and poverty in our community is never ending. The **Community Meal** that SPC supports provides nourishing food our volunteers cook and serve the first Sunday of each month – join in this food ministry. This September SPC will sponsor a second **Oxfam dinner** focused on local food challenges.

Inclusion and Equity. The **Eastern Panhandle Youth Alliance** needs more volunteers! Launched by SPC members to provide a safe space LGBTQ+ youth, their need for support is never more critical than right now. And keep an eye out for your invitation to march in the June 1 Shepherdstown Pride parade and worship together during the June 14 SPC Pride service.

As a refresher for some and as an introduction to new members, the impetus for this new approach was an all-church meeting in January 2025. Members from each of the four committees worked throughout last year on this more collaborative approach to engaging in the church's mission and social justice work, while keeping in mind how we remain true to SPC's core commitments of Engaged Compassion, Radical Hospitality and Holistic Spirituality.

Connect with the Work in the World team: Kay Schultz, Emily Gross, Anne Teresa, Barbara Hartman, Suellen Myers, Siri McDonald, Pat Hamilton, Lynn Coddington.

Also, visit SPC's website to get involved <https://shepherdstownpresbyterian.org/volunteer/>

HAVE WE ALL BEEN FED?

SPC has myriad opportunities to participate in helping so many people who are food insecure in Jefferson County. Stay abreast of what you can do by watching this space, the SPC website under Events/Calendar, Sunday bulletins, Facebook and SPC's E-News.

Community Meal has a very big need. SPC is part of a group of churches and other organizations that provides a hot meal to those in need in Jefferson County **EVERY DAY**. Every afternoon or evening, a hot meal is served in Jefferson County, primarily in Charles Town. During this period in 2025 we were serving 40-50 meals. This month we served **70 people** who needed a meal.

Community Meal can be as easy as you want to make it, everything and everyone are welcomed. It's very simple: Go to the QR code or link below which takes you right to the Perfect Pot Luck sign up. You can choose to buy a bag of oranges, or a box of cupcakes or make a casserole or cook a ham. The sign-up sheet lets you choose. After that, all you need to do is have your contribution at the SPC kitchen door by 4 p.m. on Sunday. You can leave it there early in the fridge or on the countertop, use the stickers provided to label your contribution--or deliver in a drive by at the kitchen door. It's really that simple.

Please help in any way you can. The need is growing and does not appear to be abating any time soon. This is a great way to get involved. And if you would like to serve the food at Zion Episcopal in Charles Town, there is a spot on the sign-up sheet to be a part of the serving team! If you have more questions, email Connie Ross at crossjc316@gmail.com. If you are ready to jump in, go right to:

<https://www.perfectpotluck.com/meals.php?t=WTED3207&v=cbd4748866>



IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE SUPPORT

Thanking the Christmas Angels. In December of 2025, SPC identified two families in Jefferson County Schools struggling with a new home, new schools and facing a holiday with a dearth of joy and basic needs. SPC's Christmas Angels from Immigrant and Refugee Support rallied again for the third year to collect specially selected gifts donated by SPC's congregation and friends. We received some lovely **Thank You** notes from the families, which follow. Thank you, again, SPC, for your generosity.



Thank you to all the wonderful people that God has put in our path. For the school counselor, for opening the church for all people to support us, and got to know us. May God Almighty bless you all. You made this Christmas very, very happy. ALL OUR LOVE AND RESPECT.



I don't have a way to say thank you for all the wonderful things that you did for my family. You supported us without knowing us. Your hearts are so big. We will pray a lot that God will always be with you. My son is also happy getting all of the things, the ball, the clothes, the bike, the soccer ball. I will never tire of thanking you, our angels. We love you very much.