

THE MESSENGER

October 2026
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church
Shepherdstownpresbyterian.org

PASTOR'S NOTE: Then and Now

Those of you who follow me on Facebook will notice my cover photo changes every October 1 to an image of autumn leaves and the quote: *My Favorite Color is October.*

Indeed the change of seasons is upon us, in all its vibrancy of harvest.

We, too, with SPC are in a time of vibrant harvest, as our ministries of Radical Hospitality, Holistic Spirituality, and Engaged Compassion take their full form for the program year. Christa's "Making Room for Advent" retreat launches October 3, with Sunday Seminar reflections on the retreat following through November. Our Blessing the Animals Service returns Sunday afternoon, October 4, and our annual Stewardship Campaign becomes a primary focus in our Parish Life. Our postponed Blessing the Cairn lands midmonth on Sunday, October 11, immediately following both services. The lingering light of summer guides us as we start to imagine hunkering down for winter.

Our worship and spiritual life this month invites us to revisit various parts of the SPC Timeline created during the sabbatical period and imagine together how we will "Carry the Tradition Into the Future." SPC's rich history of working for peace with justice forms our focus for October 4, noted as Peacemaking/World Communion Sunday. Our Deacons are making a special effort to offer Extended Communion this week in honor of the occasion. The holiday weekend of October 11 (Indigenous Peoples' Sunday) compels us to recall the indigenous history of the land we occupy and deconstruct the Christian narratives that supported their displacement. On October 18, we welcome Rev. Harry Daniel to the pulpit while Christopher and I take some time away to celebrate our anniversary. And then on October 25, Reformation Sunday, I will revisit my very first sermon with SPC (from Reformation Sunday 2019!) with reflections on the many ways we have been challenged to be "re-formed" in our life together.

Bible at the Bar resumes October 1 on the theme of "Jesus as Son of Man." The Meditation Circle begins October 2 in the upstairs classrooms. The Liberating Word: A Biblical Overview for Progressives continues October 20 ("God Births a People") and 27 ("The Wilderness School"), 7-8:30 p.m. in Fellowship Hall/Zoom. SPC's date to host Midweek Manna with Community Cup is October 21 and this year's Oxfam Hunger Banquet is scheduled for October 25. Lots to do and experience! May the harvest be plenty …

- 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
Lynn Dampman (she/her), Administrative Assistant
Sheila Melendez (she/her), Choir Director
Sam Jannotta (he/him), Accompanist
Mark Nutwell (he/him), Tech Support
Eva Moore, Nursery Manager

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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 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, 681-283-5314; gusti@shepherdstownpresbyterian.org

Then and Now

October Worship with SPC

Revisiting portions of the SPC Timeline,
our Worship in October invites the congregation to
Carry the Tradition Into the Future

<u>Sunday, October 4</u> **The Swordsmith Strikes Back** Micah 4:1-4
World Communion/Peacemaking Sunday
Communion
Stewardship Season Begins

Nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war anymore ...
Focus on the Peace Summit from the Timeline Project, Guns to Gardens,
and all the ways SPC will continue to work for Peace with Justice

<u>Sunday, October 4</u> **Blessing the Animals Service** Job 12:7-12
2:30 p.m. by the Cairn, King Street Sidewalk

<u>Sunday, October 11</u> **Deconstructing Manifest Destiny** Deuteronomy 34:1-12
Twenty-eighth Sunday of Ordinary Time
Indigenous Peoples' Sunday
Blessing the Cairn, following worship

Then Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab, at the Lord's command.
Focus on the Indigenous heritage of the panhandle from the Timeline Project
and how we move forward with repentance and repair

<u>Sunday, October 18</u> **Guest Preacher Harry Daniel**
TBA
Twenty-ninth Sunday of Ordinary Time

<u>Sunday, October 25</u> **Always Being Re-Formed** Genesis 2:18-23
Reformation Sunday

God built the side taken from the original human to form a new human …
Focus on all the Re-Forming SPC has done over the years and will continue to do



MAKING ROOM FOR ADVENT:

DISCOVERING THE SACRED RHYTHM OF THE CHURCH

A Retreat Led by Christa Mastrangelo Joyce

When: Saturday, October 3, 2026, 11:30 a.m.-6:30 p.m.

Where: Priest Field Retreat Center, 4030 Middleway Pike, Kearneysville, WV www.priestfield.org

What if Advent didn't have to arrive with a rush?

The Church Year offers us a different way of experiencing time—a sacred rhythm that invites us to remember, to prepare, to notice, and to participate. Through the seasons of the church, we tell and retell the story of Jesus, remembering our way back while simultaneously living our way forward into the life of faith.

During this day-long retreat, **Making Room for Advent**, we'll slow down and explore what it means to live intentionally within this sacred rhythm. Rather than simply *consuming* another Christmas season, we'll consider how we can become active participants in Advent—preparing our hearts, our homes, and our church community for what is coming.

Through Scripture, poetry, story, imaginative and contemplative practices, journaling, guided reflection, and shared food, we'll be invited to explore the relationship between sacred time and the seasons of our own lives.

Together, we'll reflect on our own seasons of life, make space for quiet and contemplation, and consider what it means to prepare for a season of **birth, along with the Advent themes of hope, peace, joy and love**. We'll explore how preparing *before* the season arrives can help us enter Christmas less distracted, less overwhelmed, and more attentive to the gifts that are already waiting for us.

And you won't leave empty-handed.

You'll receive a **journal and pen** to continue the practice of intentional reflection, share a **light meal and communion**, and enjoy a little **chocolate** along the way. Most importantly, you'll leave with practices and a renewed sense of how to **make room for sacred time**—not only for Advent, but for the seasons of faith and life that follow.

Come make room. Come slow down. Come prepare. Come discover the sacred rhythm already waiting for you.



SEPTEMBER SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

Suellen Myers, Clerk of Session

Session met on September 10 at 7:00 p.m. and a quorum was declared. Pastor Gusti called the meeting to order and opened with prayer.

Most of the meeting time was taken up by an in-depth discussion and reflection on the topic of "Where We Have Been," "Where We Are Now," and "Where We Are Heading."

Personnel - Request to confirm Sheila Melendez's request that she now direct the choir on two Sundays a month. **Approved.** Sam Janotta will suggest a hymn for the third Sunday and the choir will continue to rehearse every week.

Property - Approved moving the cairn outside to the King Street entrance with signage welcoming the public to either leave their own stone and/or take one with them.

Work in the World – Emphasized the Oxfam dinner to be held on October 25.

Adult Education - Sunday Seminars will start on September 20 with Pastor Gusti leading on September 20 and 27.

Worship – **Approved** Harry Daniel to preach on October 18 and November 8. Youth Sunday is November 15.

Clerk – The minutes for the August 13 meeting were **approved** as amended. The next stated meeting of Session is October 8.

The meeting was closed with prayer and adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

Written reports can be found elsewhere in Messenger.

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

CARRYING SPC's TRADITION INTO THE FUTURE

As we prepare for the 2027 pledge season, we give thanks for SPC's commitment to our shared ministry and support for the accomplishments of the passing year, including a restorative sabbatical, engaging youth education development, joyful and inclusive worship, vibrant Work in the World outreach, and ongoing community care—from shared meals to Guns to Gardens peace work and the faithful tending of our facilities and grounds. These ministries are possible because of your generosity.

In that spirit, the Finance Committee met to review August's financial reports and prepare for the stewardship campaign. Our conversations centered on one shared goal: stewarding SPC's resources wisely while remaining guided by Radical Hospitality, Holistic Spirituality, and Engaged Compassion.

The committee noted that pledged giving is steady, while general giving is soft. General giving is essential because it fills the gap between pledged support and rising costs. In recent years, rising expenses have been covered through a mix of pledged and general giving, special gifts, and careful draws from unrestricted funds. Those unrestricted funds are now approaching the minimum reserve the Session requires for financial stability, reminding us of the importance of strong participation in this year's stewardship season.

This year's stewardship invites us into shared responsibility and shared gratitude as we support the work of the church and our community. Pledge forms will be mailed out and made available online and at the church. Pledges help the Session plan faithfully and sustain SPC's ministries.

The next Finance Committee meeting will be October 6.

Thank you for supporting SPC's ministry through your regular giving, pledges, and special gifts. Every gift helps sustain worship, care, outreach, and the shared life of our congregation. Together we carry SPC's tradition into the future.

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 or Venmo.

BUDGET AT A GLANCE THROUGH AUGUST 31, 2026

Income and Expenses	2026 Budget (12 Months)	Actuals* through August 31	Actuals as % of the 12-Month Budget
Operating Income	$366,082	$236,135	65%
Operating Expenses	$397,841	$254,051	64%

***** *Actuals include major gifts received during the reporting period.*

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ADULT EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

SUNDAY SEMINARS BEGIN OCTOBER 4

This fall SPC's Adult Education and Spiritual Formation team offers several opportunities for you to consider. How about a small group practicing the art and skill of **listening**? Are you looking for a **Bible study** – but something more aligned with our fractured world? Would you like to try out **meditation** in a small group? Do you long to slow down? The **Sunday Seminar series** beginning October 4 is entitled: ***"Living into the Seasons: A Time for Hope, Peace and Joy."*** The sessions will be based on the retreat led by Christa Mastrangelo Joyce on Saturday, October 3, titled, ***"Making Room for Advent: Discovering the Sacred Rhythm of the Church."***

We hope you will find yourself at SPC in one of these learning and growth opportunities. Sunday Seminars are held in Fellowship Hall on Sunday mornings beginning at 9:30 a.m. or on zoom. The zoom link is https://us02web.zoom.us/j/3048766466?pwd=cnhPY3kyeG9pbUdGSmZQVVlEM2Jodz09 Please see the bulletin insert and watch for announcements in the E-news for these exciting programs! For further information contact Anne Teresa at ateresa@comcast.net



DEACON TEAM UPDATE

Donna Dettling, Deacon Moderator

Did you know that there are nine "Share the Care" ministries that fall under the deacons?

- **Deacon for the Animals –** Provides care, comfort, and assistance to those who have lost or are in the final days with a pet, are bringing a new pet into the house, or have other questions about their dear companions.
- **Meals and Rides** – Our coordinator-led teams stand ready to offer the comfort of a meal or the kindness of a ride when anyone faces illness, loss, or needs to be driven to an appointment.
- **Prayer Shawls, Baby Blankets, and Lap Robes** – A handmade shawl, blanket or lap robe can bring warmth and comfort during illness or loss, and joy at the arrival of a new baby. There is a supply on hand so we can respond quickly when a need arises.
- **PrayerNet** – A group of over 90 members prays regularly for the joys, concerns, and needs submitted by our church community to our compassionate team of administrators.
- **Support Groups** – In this time of uncertainty, a support group can be a place of refuge. When needed, we offer this sacred space so people can speak openly and find support.
- **Sustained Care** – When members with long-term health or mobility challenges or those who live alone need extra support, a care team offers visits, phone calls, and other assistance.
- **Visitor Welcome Connections** – When a new visitor requests follow-up, our team reaches out to schedule a time of conversation and information-sharing to create welcome and inclusion.
- **Workshops and Educational Events** – Life brings challenges to us all, so we periodically offer workshops on practical topics such as End-of-Life Planning and Living with Chronic Illness.
- **Young Adult** – Once our youth and young adults move into college or work, it's easy to lose touch. We bridge that gap by sending cards, notes and care packages throughout the year, as a reminder that their church family remembers and cares for them, wherever they are.

We have a current need for volunteers to provide meals and rides, knit or crochet shawls and blankets, be included in the prayer group, be part of our sustained care team, and provide items for our October Young Adult care packages. If you would like to participate in any of these ministries, please contact Donna Dettling, Deacon Moderator, at donna.dettling@gmail.com or (301) 467-0423.

Our deacon team can connect you to these and other resources, offer Extended Home Communion if you are not able to attend in person, and provide prayer, support and care as you navigate any unexpected situations. Please never feel like you are a bother, or that there are others who need care more than you. The deacons are committed to ensuring that everyone in the congregation feels welcomed, loved, and cared for, and we want to stay connected to you! Please don't hesitate to reach out to your deacon for support when you need it. Together, we can all **Share the Care**.

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.). 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, Mica Martin, Jolene Jarrell, and Sarah Wagner) rather than sending it to the whole PrayerNet group of over 90 people.

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. Please contact Carol at cwood453@aol.com with any concerns about your animals.

PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN

Julie Slonaker, Co-Moderator

We hope you have marked Thursday, October 1, at 10:00 a.m. on your calendar and will plan to attend the first Presbyterian Women's Group meeting of the new season (in the Fellowship Hall or on Zoom.) We will begin reading and discussing the book, *Mary Magdalene Revealed* by Meggan Watterson. The focus is a review of Mary's gospel and the teachings of her gospel.

The next SPC-sponsored Midweek Manna Free Community Meal at The Community Cup in Martinsburg will be on October 21 at 6:00 p.m. Presbyterian Women, the Eastern Panhandle Youth Alliance, and congregation members are invited to provide food or volunteer to serve or lead a devotion. We will be providing these meals every two months for approximately 40 people. **Here's the link to sign-up and see details: https://www.perfectpotluck.com/meals.php?t=KBVD6811**



WHAT'S NEW AT WORK IN THE WORLD

What We've Given in 2026

The Work in the World Team directs funding to organizations and programs identified for support in this first year of our new collaborative model. The $30,000 approved by Session is comparable to 2025, but some of the beneficiaries have changed. Specific programs identified in each organization align more closely with our focus areas of Justice and Peace, Inclusion and Equity, Systemic Poverty and Earth Care where we believe we can have a more tangible impact. We've also built flexibility into our funding model so that, where needed, we may shift funds to meet emergency needs.

Recipients in the Third Quarter:

$500 to **West Virginia Rivers** for watershed education and advocacy in WV
$500 to **Jefferson County Foundation to** educate about the impact of local development on groundwater and land use
$750 for **Community Markets, Inc**. to address systemic poverty
$500 for **Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)** for volunteer recruitment
$3,000 for **Jefferson County Community Ministries** to support the unhoused
$1,000 for **Martinsburg Rescue Mission** for program support
$1407 for immigrant family support
$120 for **LGBTQIA** advocacy and support

Recipients in the Second Quarter:

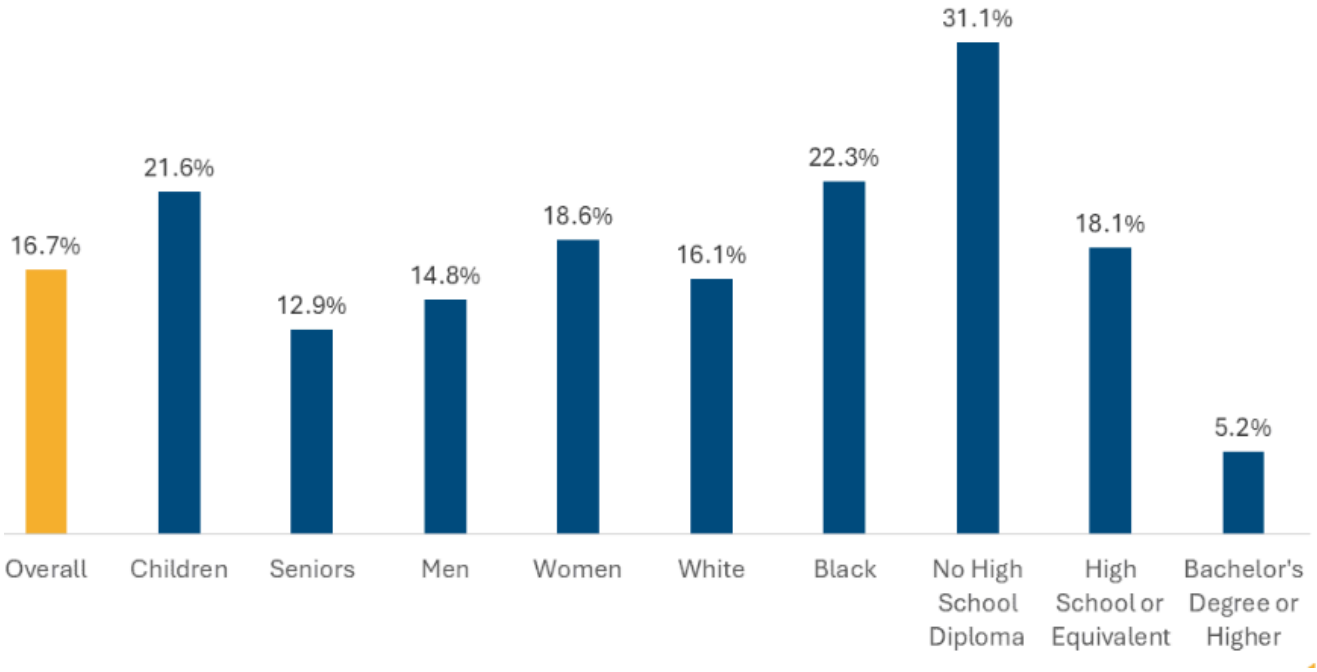
$250 for **More Light Presbyterians**, committed to centering LGBTQIA people in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and beyond
$150 for immigrant family support
$525 for **LGBTQIA** support and Pride month supplies
$1,500 for **Coalfield Development**, Huntington, WV
$2,000 to complete funding of SPC **Guns to Gardens**
$1,500 for **Durable Solutions Congo** to support a solar power project
$1,000 to **EPEC** (Eastern Panhandle Empowerment Center)
$1,000 to **ANAR** for Palestinian children's programs
$3,000 to the **Presbyterian Home of the Highlands**, Wytheville, VA
$500 to **Annunciation House** in El Paso, TX for migrant care
$250 to support **Covenant Network of Presbyterians**, a national LGBTQIA support group of churches

Recipients in the First Quarter:

$3,500 to the **Bluefields Nicaragua Partnership & VERBO Scholarships**
$500 to **West Virginia Rivers** for watershed advocacy in WV
$500 to **Jefferson County Foundation to** educate about local impact of development on groundwater and land use
$750 to **Community Markets Inc.** during the United Way campaign so that the CMI donation will be matched by the "Unity" campaign

We Are Looking at Poverty Rates for West Virginia in 2024.

The situation is worse than this with the recent cuts to SNAP.



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Create! Grow! Buy Local! Forage! Cook!
However You Are Able to Contribute

✔ **Food collection for JCCM** - Presbyterian Women spearhead this ongoing collection basket activity for non-perishables, tied in to our communion days, although food can be dropped off any time (in the sanctuary or outside the office).
✔ **Food collection for Shepherdstown Shares/Ecumenical Food Pantry** - Presbyterian Women also spearhead this ongoing collection basket activity for non-perishables, tied in to our communion days, although food can be dropped off any time (in the sanctuary or outside the office).
✔ **Food and supplies collection for the Youth** away/at school - Part of the deacons' Young Adult Ministry to stay connected with those who have graduated from high school and are in college or working; care packages that include snacks and candy are collected and sent periodically.
✔ **Community Meal**—Held the first Sunday of each month at Zion Episcopal Church in Charles Town. Cook or buy food to share and/or be a part of the serving team! If you have more questions, email Connie Ross at rossjc316@gmail.com. If you are ready to jump in, go to: https://www.perfectpotluck.com/meals.php?t=WTED3207&v=cbd4748866
✔ **Community Cup meals** - Presbyterian Women provide and serve a meal approximately every two months on a Wednesday evening for 25 - 50 people; anyone can help serve or provide food for the meal.
✔ **Meals for congregants in need** – the Deacon's Meals and Rides Ministry provides meals as needed for people dealing with a loss, health issue, or other challenges.

✔ **Community Markets, Inc**. – Is a WV non-profit purchasing food from local farmers and providing affordable, healthy food to the community. SPC supports CMI through donations, but they are always in need of drivers and helpers.
✔ **Plant** an extra row in your garden. JCCM and Shepherdstown Shares can always use food donations as well as neighbors in our congregation and beyond. Let someone on the Work in the World team know you have fresh food to share. workintheworldspc@gmail.com
✔ **Become a food driver** for those who fear leaving home for myriad reasons. This population is growing.

Eastern Panhandle Empowerment Center August 2026

Did you know that when you give financially to SPC, your funds could be helping many non-profit groups in our area? One such group is the Eastern Panhandle Empowerment Center (EPEC). You may have known this group as the Shenandoah Women's Center; they changed the name in 2018, but maintained their mission of protecting victims, preventing violence and empowering survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, and human trafficking.

Founded in 1977, they have offices in Jefferson, Berkeley, and Morgan Counties. In the last year they have provided direct services to over 1,800 individuals experiencing victimization including all ages and genders. They also address policy needs in our state, local, and federal governments advocating for survivors in all areas of the law.

In 2025, in addition to serving more than 1,800 people, they provided over 200 hours of training to allied partners, who work with survivors every day. Though their shelter is too small to meet all current needs (with a waitlist of over 50 people), they were still able to provide shelter services to over 300 people. They also provided an average of four hours per week of violence prevention training to children and adults.

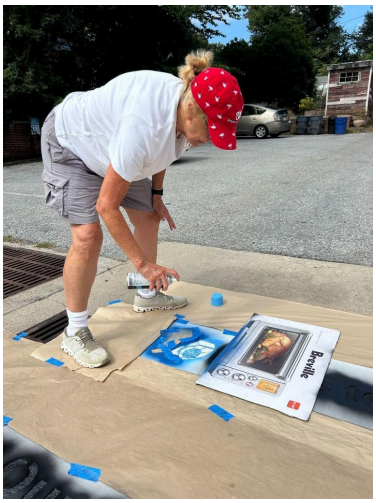
The EPEC staff and volunteers are grateful to the SPC congregation for their generous financial gift of $1,000 in June 2026 saying that "none of the work we do would be possible without our community; thank you for being a part of our life saving work!"

Timely Message - Help Keep Our Waterways Clean!

The SPC Work in the World team supports initiatives for clean water near and far. You might notice that the storm drain in the church parking lot has a new fresh look! Our Earth care group partnered with the Town Run Watershed who purchased stencils for marking storm drains in Shepherdstown. The church parking lot is our first project. Check it out! (See next page.)

Did you know that all of the storm drains in Shepherdstown collect stormwater runoff and direct it into Town Run, our beloved spring fed stream flowing through Town and into the Potomac River? Town Run is a back up drinking water source for the Town.

Why mark storm drains?
Storm drains collect untreated stormwater that runs off of our streets. This stormwater carries pollutants such as grease, oil, pet waste, and fertilizer with it as it flows directly into local streams and rivers, and eventually into the Chesapeake Bay. Storm drain markings help spread the message that we all play a role in keeping our waterways clean.







Stenciling on storm drain

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SAVE THE DATES!

On October 3, Pride in The Park, a festival for the LGBTQIA Community and Allies, 1 p.m. until 6 p.m. at War Memorial Park in Martinsburg. Contact Pat Hamilton to help at the EPYA and SPC table.

On October 21, the next SPC-sponsored **Midweek Manna Free Community Meal** at The Community Cup in Martinsburg will be held at 6 p.m. Join Presbyterian Women and the Eastern Panhandle Youth Alliance to help provide food for our neighbors.

On October 25, SPC will once again hold an **Oxfam dinner** in Shepherdstown! This dinner will be focused on local poverty and food insecurity in West Virginia. More to come on this important educational and, frequently, inspiring event.

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

GREATER SHEPHERDSTOWN ALLIANCE (GSA): INVESTING IN OUR COMMUNITY

By Charlotte Baker-Shenk

Many of us have been deeply concerned about significant threats to our ecosystem and the ongoing loss of farmlands and tree canopy/green spaces. For several years, a small group of concerned folks met together regularly (including Kay Schultz, Kristin Alexander (Potomac Valley Audubon Society), and Joe Hankins (VP, Conservation Fund) to better understand what has been happening here locally and what resources we might marshal together to make a difference.

While the group gained clarity about various local properties nearby and grant opportunities to address local concerns, we did not see any clear structure in place that was available to receive funds and carefully administer their use. After the Conservation Fund administrator retired and left the area, the group stopped meeting. Another factor was national changes that significantly reduced available grant funding.

However, in 2024, greatly alarmed by the rapid loss of agricultural land and forested areas in Jefferson County, the group re-emerged with mostly new members. This time, instead of assuming grant funds would be required to address their concerns, we decided to **open our own pocket books** and encourage others to do the same–working collaboratively to make a difference in our communities.

In June of 2024, this group convened a large gathering of people also distressed about the explosive growth of new housing and industrial developments nearby and their impacts on the ecosystem. People in attendance resonated vigorously with the need to act quickly – – before so much more is lost!

As a first action, the group formed an LLC (Shepherdstown Conservation Partners) and purchased a nearby 30-acre plot of farmland bounded by Rt. 230 and Engle-Molers. That land has now been placed into permanent agricultural easement with the Jefferson County Board of Farmland Protection. It has also been formally leased to a newly-formed group of younger farmers called Shepherdstown Farm Co-op, who will be farming the land with livestock, berries, food forestry, and other crops.

As a second action, the group created a 501(c)3 organization called Greater Shepherdstown Alliance (GSA). We have been holding public meetings every two months at the War Memorial Building on topics like how conservation easements work and local supportive organizations as well as missed opportunities for preservation in Jefferson County. Our most recent meeting focused on “water” (impacts of development on water quality and quantity), with presentations by Dr. Than Hitt (WV Rivers.), Dr. Christine Wimer (Jefferson County Foundation) and Kay Schultz (Town Run). Our next public meeting will be on Monday, October 12, at 6:30 p.m. People can also join smaller work groups on various topics (farmland protection, work force housing, communication/education).

All are invited to come, learn, and hopefully find ways to contribute to the work! For more information, contact: Charlotte Baker-Shenk Bakershenk@aol.com 301-801-2793



GSA Group (Charlotte and Phil Baker-Shenk on right)

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SPC's LISTENING SESSIONS COMPLETE THE FIRST SERIES!

By Jen Jones

In the summer and fall of 2025, two groups attended Sabbatical Planning Retreats. A key outcome of those retreats was the desire for deep connection and reflection throughout Pastor Gusti's sabbatical. Keith Loudermill introduced the idea of a series of *Listening Sessions* using the guidebook: *Heart to Heart* by Christine Robinson and Alicia Hawkins, and the rest is now history!

These sessions are designed for groups of up to eight people. SPC's first group included Keith and Tim Loudermill, Mica Martin, Carol Wood, Dani Noir, Jen Jones, Yvonne Fisher, and Jolene Jarrell. Following the guidebook's process, the group shared their reflections across 14 gatherings; every other week. The topics covered were: *Listening, Gratitude, Balance, Forgiveness, God, Loss and Grief, Money, Nature, Success and Failure, Friendship, Doubt, Making Peace with Parents, Sustainable Living,* and *Endings*. Powerful topics, all!

On July 28, the group held the ending ceremony and enjoyed a potluck celebratory meal together! Each person shared their parting thoughts and what the session meant to them. Jolene shared a particularly moving poem that she had written about each of the members. (See next page.) The group thanks Keith and Tim Loudermill for the majority of host duties. *We will be forever grateful for our time together.*

SPC Listening Groups will continue and the next group will be announced in the near future.

The Gathering Garden By Jolene Jarrell



There is a garden unlike any other,
where hearts have gathered and grown,
where every flower has a story,
and no one blooms alone.

Jen is the Sunflower.
She follows the light wherever it leads,
finding wonder in the world
and beauty in the simplest of things.
Like a sunflower reaching toward the sun,
her spirit reminds us to look for the light.

Mica is Lavender.
Soft in presence, yet powerful in purpose,
compassionate, thoughtful, and kind.
Her healing spirit is like lavender–
quietly soothing the heart,
calming the soul,
and leaving a little peace behind
wherever she goes.

Yvonne is the Iris.
Deeply rooted, wise, and resilient,
standing tall through changing seasons.
Her roots speak of experience,
her blooms speak of wisdom,
and her strength reminds us
that true growth comes from
holding firmly to what grounds us.

Tim is the Orchid.
Rare, distinctive, and perfectly himself.
An orchid does not try to be a rose or a
sunflower or a lily.
It simply blooms as it was meant to bloom.
And that is Tim–unique, extraordinary,
and perfectly at home in his own beauty.

Carol is the Tiger Lily.
Colorful, independent,and protective with a
heart that makes room for every creature,
great and small. She sees beauty where others might
overlook it and reminds the garden
that compassion is one of life's brightest colors.

Dani is the Rose.
Beautiful, guarded, hopeful, and strong.
Her beauty shines from deep within,
but her thorns remind us to enter gently–
for trust is something earned,
and love is something held with care.

Jolene is the Peony.
Strong beneath the surface,
resilient through every storm,
and determined to bloom again.
The peony reminds us that beauty
does not mean a life without hardship.
It means having the strength
to keep growing after the storm has passed.

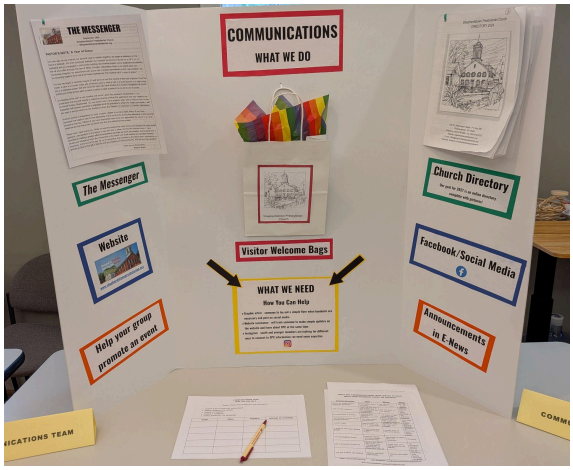
Keith is the Peace Lily.
He brings acceptance without judgment,
joy without expectation,
and calm without asking anything in return.
Like the peace lily,
his presence quietly changes the room,
making space for everyone
to simply be who they are.

The sunflower brings light.
The lavender brings healing.
The iris brings wisdom.
The orchid brings uniqueness.
The tiger lily brings compassion.
The rose brings courage.
The peony brings resilience.
And the peace lily brings calm.

The Gathering Garden–
Rooted in compassion,
growing in grace,
and beautiful
by every heart that has found its place.

COMMITTEE FAIR
September 13, 2026

A Committee Fair was held to recognize SPC committees and possibly recruit new members interested in these areas.



Communications



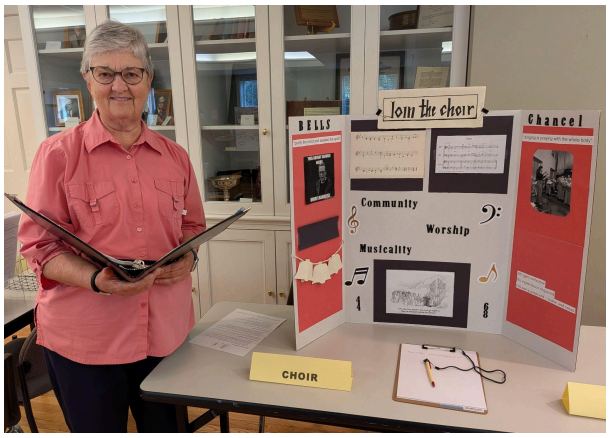
Personnel



Adult Education



Children & Youth



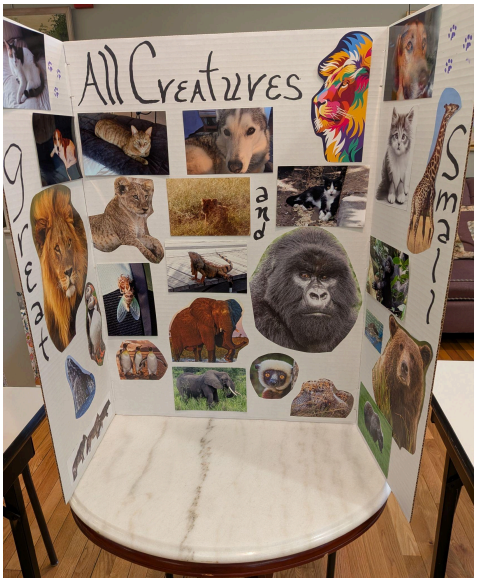
Choir



Presbyterian Women



Deacons



Deacon for the Animals



Worship



Work in the World

ANNUAL PICNIC
September 13, 2026













(More pictures on next page.)





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THE EASTERN COYOTE
By Carol Wood, Deacon for the Animals

One of my favorite things to do in the evening is to sit on my porch and listen to the many voices of nature that live around my home–barred owls, cicadas, and locusts, and the social ticking sound of little brown bats. Over the last month, I have heard a new voice emanating from the cornfield across the road from my house–the Eastern Coyote. Native to North America, coyotes live in all 49 states, with Hawaii being the exception. Being exceptionally adaptable, the eradication of wolves to suppress their numbers, coyote populations and territories surged.

Smaller than a wolf, larger than a fox, Eastern Coyotes are easily identified. Their coat, a grey-brown to reddish, is dense, keeping them warm in winter. Their eyes show an amber or yellow color and their ears are pointed and erect, with a long and bushy tail tipped in black. They are shy mammals, being spotted in many locations including large cities in the US, generally avoiding people, viewing humans as large, dangerous threats. Attacks on humans are very uncommon. Coyotes are most active at dawn and dusk.

In order to co-exist with our new neighbors, here are ways to prevent them from coming into our yards.

- Make sure all trash is placed in garbage cans with secure, tight lids.
- Never leave pet food or water outside at night.
- Make sure to bring small pets in at night as they look like prey.
- Never try to feed a wild animal, as it encourages them to feel safe around humans.

As their habitat continues to disappear, we need to adapt to sharing this beautiful planet with all the diverse and amazing wildlife that, too, call this home.