Building A Church That Reflects God's Heart
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Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church
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Based on 1 Corinthians 13

Building a Church That Reflects God's Heart. This is who we say we want to be. This is who we have already tried to be as an *inclusive spiritual community, welcoming all who seek meaning, hope, and belonging.*

If our newest members have anything to say about it, we are moving in the right direction. Chris Meadows affirms, for example, it was the PRIDE flag hanging on the side of our church building that finally brought him inside. (And *not* his wife's nagging that he needed to get back to church!) *I want to be a better person*, Chris told us in the new member class. *SPC helps me do that.*

Indeed, as Nan Pantle shares, so often here at SPC *God's love to others happens deeply and meaningfully through [seemingly] small gifts of letting others know we care.* Nan encourages us to read a poem titled "In Praise of Pyrex" by Paige Gilchrist, which describes a covered dish containing banana pudding offered to a depleted mother in the wake of her daughter's surgery as a sign and seal of grace, not unlike communion. *Here in this sanctuary*, Nan says, *and in Sunday Seminar, we learn to attend to the small things, which is prayer so magnified by gratitude.*

Barbara Hartman agrees. *When I walk into SPC for church or meetings, it is like going through a portal into a magical and mystical beautiful world where each person reflects an abundance of God's love. I'm grateful to have this church to help me remember God's love, enhance my human experience and make life so much more flavorful, juicy and wondrous! And help to solve the world's problems.*

Solving the world's problems is much on the mind of Than Hitt, our resident environmental justice consultant. *The solar project at SPC*, Than reminds us, *reflects our commitment to building a church that embodies God's heart through faith, stewardship, and service. In 2014, we celebrated the installation of our 60-panel solar array with a joyful ribbon-cutting ceremony attended by church members, community leaders, and more than 100 local schoolchildren. The project was the largest community-supported solar project in West Virginia at the time, made possible through innovative partnerships and the generosity of local households. More than 12 years later, our panels have generated enough to power 22 average American homes for an entire year. Beyond reducing our electricity costs and environmental footprint, the project helped pioneer a model for community-supported solar that inspired other organizations across West Virginia. It remains a visible expression of our faith and our hope for a healthier, more just, and sustainable future.*

Becky Phipps laments that a healthier, more just, and sustainable future has been hard to hope for these past years. *Building a church that reflects God's heart?* Becky queries. *It occurs to me that SPC has always tried to do this, has put itself out there, ever trying to build the beloved community in many ways, which has been much more of a challenge in the past ten years or so as autocratic rule has taken over and the progress of the past in the direction of a better world for all has been undone to a startling degree. Suffice it to say that reflecting God's love has become really hard to do! But, through Sunday Seminar, which I don't attend nearly as often as I would like, and reminders—if not admonishments—from the pulpit that this is really happening, and that we need to pay attention, there's been a positive impact. And we are still here! We continue to try to do what we can. We continue to show up. And we continue to build.*

Ed Zahniser puts it well in his poem for us today. Yes, there remains grief unspeakable still in our midst on this Realm of Love Sunday. AND we hold on to a promise that one day, at the end of all days, the ones who have been crucified will be the ones who lead us into perpetual wholeness. One day, at the end of all days, the brief moments of Love we find breaking through on this day — *like dawn after long Cold War whose heated hell shredded them and us* — will have the last word.

In the meantime, we build a church that reflects God's heart, dimly, as in a mirror. Where we have failed, we pray God will correct us. Where we have done well, we pray God will encourage us. As we continue, we pray God will guide us. We try, we fall short, we gain wisdom, and we try again. One day, we trust, at the end of all days, faith, hope and love will remain.

And the greatest of these is Love.