



# INTERPRETATION

Sewickley Presbyterian Church Newsletter | January 2025

Be renewed within your mind,  
A change so deep, a shift of heart and mind,

As dawn transforms the night, so let it be—  
A vision born of grace and clarity.

Put on the new, the radiant, the pure,  
A self reborn, in righteousness secure,

Created in His image, bright and true,  
Made holy by the love that calls you through.

Ephesians 4:23 & 24



# SPC STAFF

**REV. DEREK DAVENPORT**  
Pastor/Head of Staff  
[ddavenport@sewickleypresby.org](mailto:ddavenport@sewickleypresby.org)

**REV. MIKE CREAMER**  
Associate Pastor  
[mcreamer@sewickleypresby.org](mailto:mcreamer@sewickleypresby.org)

**SHARON BARBER**  
Assistant to the Pastor  
[sbarber@sewickleypresby.org](mailto:sbarber@sewickleypresby.org)

**DAVE BREIT**  
Media Engineer  
[dbreit@sewickleypresby.org](mailto:dbreit@sewickleypresby.org)

**RICI BROCKINSON**  
Broadcast Producer  
Multi Media Coordinator  
[rbrockinson@sewickleypresby.org](mailto:rbrockinson@sewickleypresby.org)

**JEREMY FISHER**  
Praise Team Director  
[jfisher@sewickleypresby.org](mailto:jfisher@sewickleypresby.org)

**MICHAEL HAMMER**  
Choir Director & Organist  
[mhammer@sewickleypresby.org](mailto:mhammer@sewickleypresby.org)

**JENNIFER JOHNSON**  
Director of Communications  
[jjohnson@sewickleypresby.org](mailto:jjohnson@sewickleypresby.org)

**ERIN LEGHORN**  
Director of FriendShip Preschool  
Director of Discipleship Ministries  
[eleghorn@sewickleypresby.org](mailto:eleghorn@sewickleypresby.org)

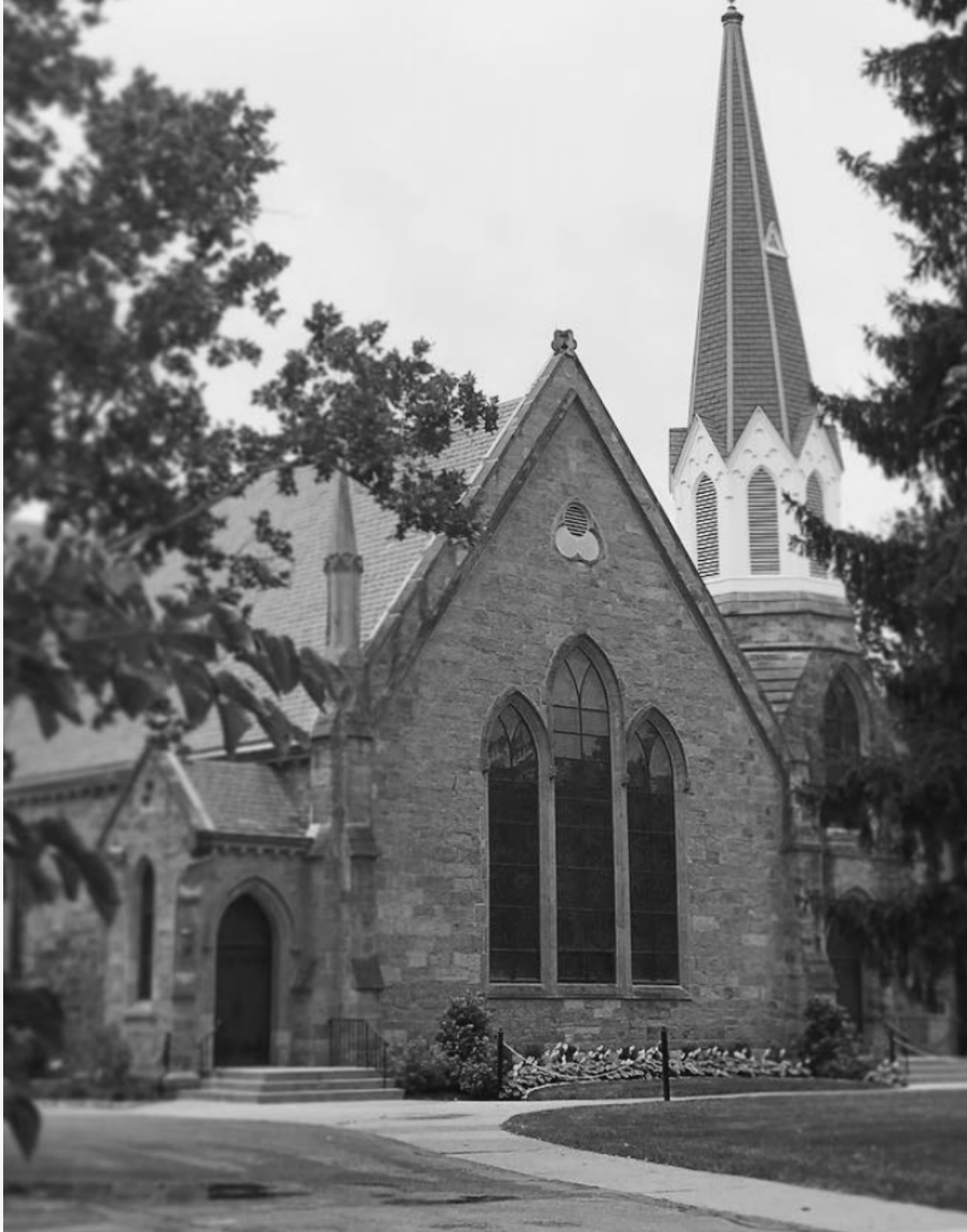
**HANNA MELLOR**  
Children's Ministries Coordinator  
[hmellor@sewickleypresby.org](mailto:hmellor@sewickleypresby.org)

**LAURA MIKUSH, CCA**  
Business Administrator  
[lmikush@sewickleypresby.org](mailto:lmikush@sewickleypresby.org)

**NICOLE QUAKA**  
Children's Ministries Coordinator  
[nquaka@sewickleypresby.org](mailto:nquaka@sewickleypresby.org)

**ELIZABETH SZUBA**  
Director of Congregational Care  
[eszuba@sewickleypresby.org](mailto:eszuba@sewickleypresby.org)

**THOM LOCKWOOD  
GRETEL & JOEY TOMALES**  
Custodial Staff



## WHAT'S INSIDE?

3: From Our Pastor  
4: What Happens Now?  
5: A New Year for Adult Ed  
6: Angels & Legends  
8: Dollars & Sense  
8: Coming Up  
8: Weekly Prayer Walk  
9: Celtic Spirituality in Ireland  
10: New Members

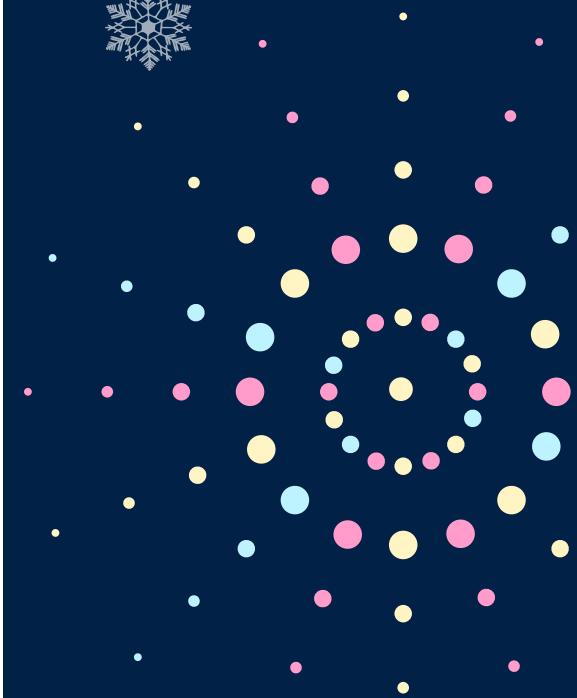
10: Advent Candle Stand  
11: Stewardship  
12: Leadership Training  
12: Women's Retreat Review  
13: Ushering  
14: Join Our Choir  
15: Count Your Blessings  
16: SPC Kids  
18: SPC Youth

19: A Busy Fall  
20: True Blessings  
21: Mission Matters  
21: Day on the Lawn  
21: Neighbors in Need  
22: Capital Campaign  
BC: Meet Rici Brockinson

## SOCIAL MEDIA







# ROLL ‘EM UP!

By Rev. Dr. Derek Davenport, Pastor

There is something so energizing about the start of a new year. I think the right metaphor for this coming year is “sleeves.”

As we look back on the past few weeks, we had so many opportunities to take part in ministry together, from the joy of candles on Christmas Eve to the fun we had considering the Grinch on the Sunday after. Now, we stand on the threshold of a new year, curious about what God has in store for us.

This year promises to be an historic one for SPC. There will be opportunities for growth, for giving, for worship, for service, for fellowship - opportunities to bless and be blessed. These opportunities will require us to roll up our sleeves and get to work.

As we begin this year, we face some glorious challenges. One is that our programs for children and families have grown so well and so quickly that we have begun to stretch our staffing. We are beginning to hit our capacity for volunteers and staff members.

This presents us with two options. On the one hand, we could just limit participation. That’s not a particularly attractive option. After all, Jesus is emphatic that his followers should allow children to come to him. On the other hand, we could heed Jesus words, roll up our sleeves and grow our capacity. This will take some work, but when has SPC ever shied away from hard work? If someone from Children’s Ministry asks you to be involved, roll up your sleeves and say yes.

As we look farther ahead, we are part way through our Capital Campaign. This year, our church will begin enhancing the hospitality, access, and safety of our facilities. If you haven’t had a chance to pledge your contribution to this project, I encourage you to do so. This is our opportunity to shape and strengthen the ministry of our congregation for generations to come. As a congregation, we will roll up our sleeves and do the work of enhancing our facilities and our capacity for ministry.

We also find ourselves in the midst of transitions in our pastoral staff. We’ve said goodbye to an Rev. Emily Miller after two years of ministry, and we look forward to a new phase of ministry at SPC. There are too many details on that topic to cover here, so look for more information in an article in this Interpretation. In short, we have the chance to roll up our sleeves and get to work as God calls us into new ministries.

There are so many opportunities on the horizon for us this year. We are in the rare situation that our only limits are self-imposed. I encourage you to join in the joy of this ministry. Let’s roll up our sleeves and do the work of ministry together.



# WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

By Rev. Dr. Derek Davenport, Pastor

In times of transition, there is one clear question that we ask: “What happens now?”

Having said goodbye to Rev. Miller, you may be asking that exact question. There are so many pastoral duties in our congregation and it’s important for us to keep our pastoral staff resourced to keep up with the pace of our church.

Thankfully, our Personnel Committee had enough notice about the transition to begin planning, and started meeting in October to think through the transition. Personnel has spoken with Pittsburgh Presbytery and with Session and has determined that the right next step is to explore bringing in a Parish Associate. To explain what that means, it may be helpful to review some of the specific terminology relating to Presbyterian pastors.

In our denomination, there are several categories of pastoral relationships for congregations – the one with which we are most familiar is an Installed Pastor. Pastoral positions like that are called by the entire congregation and involve an installation service by the Presbytery as well as a formal Pastor Nominating Committee. This process is familiar to us because it’s the process SPC used to call me as the Head Pastor. The process is lengthy, sometimes taking multiple years.

Another category is the Temporary Pastor, which is a year-to-year contract. A temporary pastor is called by

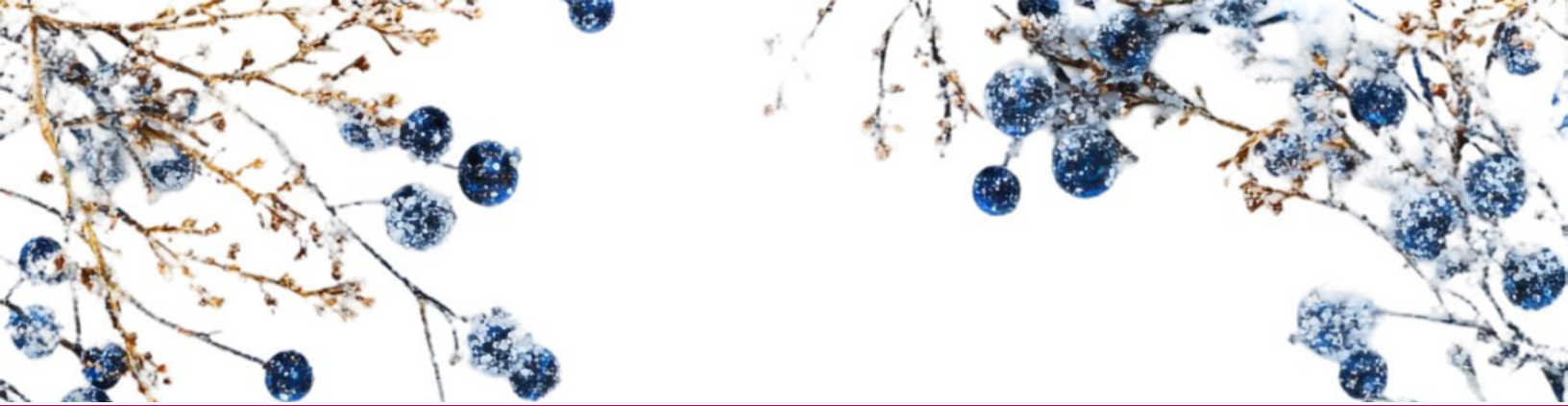
the Session, and is ordained, but not installed. It does not require a formal Pastor Nominating Committee. This is the category of relationship SPC has with Rev. Creamer, our Associate Pastor.

The Parish Associate is a third category. A Parish Associate is an ordained pastor within the Presbytery who develops a relationship with a specific congregation without being formally installed. We have had several Parish Associates over the years – for example, our own Rev. Dr. Stew Lawrence served as Parish Associate here for several years. This category of pastoral relationship requires input from both the Session and the Presbytery.

Our Personnel Committee has recommended this third category to Session. Pittsburgh Presbytery has been part of the conversation with us as we discern the next steps. We plan to begin formal conversations with potential candidates this month.

Transitions tend to be so bittersweet. It’s hard to say goodbye to a pastor, yet we look forward to new and exciting possibilities on the horizon. As often happens during transitions, there will be other shifts and additions to our staff as we consider where God is leading us. More information will be available as we move forward, particularly at the congregational meeting on January 26.





# A NEW YEAR FOR ADULT EDUCATION ON SUNDAYS

## LOCATION: ANSBY HALL

### JANUARY 12

#### **Serving in God's Mission: Sewickley**

Floyd Faulkner, Community Youth Worker will talk about his continued work with the youth in our schools and his work with the Sewickley Community Center.

### JANUARY 19

#### **A Life of Kenneth E. Bailey**

Dr. Michael Parker will be speaking about his recently published book *Through Middle Eastern Eyes: A Life of Kenneth E. Bailey*. In addition to writing several books, Dr. Parker has served as a missionary and professor of church history in Sudan and Rwanda, as well as professor of history and director of graduate studies at Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo, Egypt. He has also served as a pastor of a congregation and administrator for mission for his denomination.

### JANUARY 26

10 AM service only  
No Sunday School classes

### FEBRUARY 2 - FEBRUARY 23

#### **Jesus' Family Tree**

SPC Member Jay West will be teaching this series about the origins of the early Christian Sects, Schisms, and the Resulting Denominations.

## LOCATION: LIBRARY

### **GOOD NEWS BIBLE STUDY**

The Good News Bible study group invites you to join them on Sunday mornings as they continue studying the Book of Acts. If you have wondered why scripture matters so much as we grow closer to God on our faith journey or if you have wanted to make Jesus come more alive in your heart then please come!

We are learning together from scripture and from each other! Everyone is welcome no matter what questions you have or where you are in your faith journey. Acts is a great way to learn how our faith and churches developed in response to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. It is an exciting story and foundation of our faith 2000 years later.

We hope to see you Sunday mornings to hear the GOOD NEWS! The study is led by Brian Wood and Joan Murdoch.

---

## LOCATION: CAMPBELL ROOM

### **BREAKFAST CLUB**

Looking for a relaxed, casual way to connect with others in our church family? We'd love to have you join us! Grab a coffee, enjoy a treat, and be part of a laid-back conversation where we talk about life, family, work, faith, or whatever comes up. It's a great way to get to know each other and build community in a friendly, no-pressure setting. All are welcome!





# ANGELS & LEGENDS

## Transforming Our Church Spaces

By Nicole Quaka, Children's Ministry Coordinator

We sometimes hear of kind-hearted children who for their birthdays ask people to donate to a cause of their choice instead of getting presents. This past summer within our own church, a little girl named Addington Coates, wanted to ask her friends to bring filled backpacks to her birthday party to donate to the Center for Hope in lieu of birthday presents. When she found out her birthday party would be after the backpacks would be donated, she gathered her church friends and had a lemonade stand to raise money for backpacks instead. They were able to fill FOUR backpacks with the money raised from the lemonade stand.

These stories touch our hearts so deeply because we see Christ's love tangibly lived out in the lives of young children. There is something so beautiful in seeing other people sacrifice of themselves to give to others, especially children.

I'm sure there have been many times as an adult you too have wanted to ask people to donate to a worthy cause for your birthday or Christmas instead of giving you gifts. The Angels and Legends fund at Sewickley Presbyterian Church was designed to do just that. By requesting your family and friends give to the Angels and Legends fund as your birthday or Christmas gift or by giving additional money you may receive throughout the year to this fund, you can ensure your monetary gifts are given to areas you are most passionate about within the church.

This year, through members of our church using the Angels and Legends fund directed toward children's ministries, we have been able to create programs that we haven't seen in years at SPC. Through hanging whiteboards in the Children's Studios, mounting TV's, purchasing kid-friendly rugs to sit on, and installing toddler sized-bookcases we have been able to transform our learning spaces and give children access to Jesus in a way that is meaningful for them.

The long term impact of this seemingly small act of kindness is hard to measure. I've been a part of this church family for only a few years, but I've had the opportunity to talk to so many of you who have been here 20, 30, 50+ years. Adults who were baptized in this church have told me so many stories about growing up here at SPC throughout the years. I hear stories of them as babies from their parents and then get to listen to them re-tell of their own time in Sunday School or in the Children's Choir. These are my favorite conversations. I learn so much through these memories and I've seen what happens when a church dedicates it's entire existence (through many generations) to shining God's light on others. I can't help but think that will be our current children sooner than we know it. Will they remember the cozy rainbow rug, or the bookcase shaped like a tree that was bought with Angels and Legends funds? Honestly, probably not, but I think in 20 or 30 years when we hear the children of our church reminisce on their time here as children and youth, what was given to

continued on next page...



AFTER



them through Angels and Legends will be lingering in the background of each conversation. They might not know exactly what was given that made them feel special here, but they will remember the love they felt at SPC because they had cozy spaces to learn in, they will remember the impact Jesus had on their hearts because their teachers were equipped, and they will surely remember the feeling they had standing in front of their church family at Word Sung singing “He came among us meek and poor.”

Of course, as the coordinator for Children’s Ministries I tend to direct all of my passion and energy into thinking about them, but the Angels and Legends fund is not designed to only support children and youth. The Angels and Legends fund is designed to go straight into whatever ministry YOU are passionate about. We are incredibly appreciative in Children’s Ministry when people direct their Angels and Legends gifts to us, but these gifts could also be directed to education and staff development, youth ministries, congregational care...there are no limits. Whatever God has placed on your heart to bless with your monetary gift, that is where your gift will go when you decide to take advantage of this amazing fund. It could be specific such as, “I want my \$1,125 gift to provide personal Bibles to graduating 3<sup>rd</sup> graders for three years.” Or it could be “I want to provide coffee for the Breakfast Club for a year,” or “I want our Youth Hangs to be funded for three months.”

If you aren’t sure exactly where you want your gift to go within Angels and Legends, but you know you want to bless what we need most at SPC, our staff can help you make that decision, but I challenge you in the days and weeks ahead to also have conversations with the people who have been here for decades. See for yourselves the light that has been passed on through generation to generation. Just like those stories of children giving up their gifts to give to others, I think these stories from people who have lived through our church’s history will illuminate just how strong Jesus’ light shines in all of us here at SPC and how much it has always shined in everyone who came before us.

The picture on this page and the previous page show an example of how the funds have been used to transform one of our childcare spaces, enhancing the learning environment so far.

I’ve said it probably a million times since joining, but Sewickley Presbyterian truly is a special church and I thank those of you who have already given to the Angels and Legends fund directed toward children and youth ministry from the bottom of my heart.





## DOLLARS & SENSE

By Laura Mikush, Business Administrator

Did you know? The cost of natural gas (Columbia Gas) in 2024 for the church was \$19,500. We paid \$2,300 for the Faith House.

## COMING UP

- Sunday, January 26**  
10 AM Service Only  
followed by Annual Meeting
- Sunday, February 9**  
Youth Sunday
- Sunday, February 23**  
Founders' Day
- Tuesday, March 4**  
Mardi Gras Pancake Supper
- Wednesday, March 5**  
Ash Wednesday Service
- Wednesday, March 12**  
Lenten Study/Suppers Begin



## WEEKLY PRAYER WALK

By Pam Charles, SPC member

Every Wednesday, the Congregation Care Ministry Prayer Team meets in Ansby Hall to pray for our church family, our youth, the activities happening that week, and the meetings in our church. Recently, we decided to take our prayers out into the community and go for a Prayer Walk. It had been raining, but as we started there was blue sky (a good sign!).

We began our Prayer Walk at the Sewickley Community Center. We had called ahead and Bob Patterson, President of the Board of Sewickley Community Center, was waiting for us. Bob talked about how the Center was formed and what programs are offered now. We prayed for the Sewickley Community Center and how it provides for the needs of the community. Then we headed back to the church and prayed for all the children who use the playground.

Next, we went to the Village Coffee to pray for Mike and the youth who meet there each week. We also walked to the Fire Station, the Police Station, Quaker Valley Middle School, and the Library. At each stop, we read a Bible verse and prayed out loud and silently for the people involved. We ended up back at the church by the Bittering Cross. We thanked God for hearing our prayers. We asked Him that our church might be a light to our community through our words, actions, and prayers.

As we walked through Sewickley, we saw God's world and the yellow, red, and orange leaves on the trees - beautiful. We prayed many prayers for our church - meaningful. Our Prayer Team spent time together - special. As we finished the Prayer Walk, the blue sky was replaced by clouds. But that was OK because Derek taught us in Bible Basics that clouds in the Bible represent the presence of God. Amen.





# Celtic Spirituality in Ireland

## Progressive Pilgrimage

October 5-15, 2024



By Tim Merrill, SPC Member

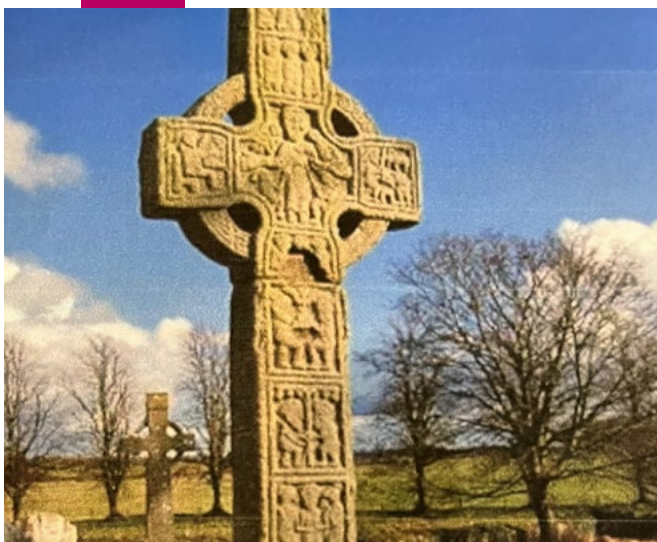


Members of our church family traveled to Ireland in October on a pilgrimage to learn about Celtic spirituality. The pilgrimage began with travel from Pittsburgh to Dublin, followed by a visit to Glendalough's Monastic Site, where the group held a Communion service by the lake. They then visited St. Brigid's home in Kildare and explored ancient sites like Newgrange, Knowth, and the Hill of Tara.

In Armagh, they learned about Celtic traditions and visited St. Patrick's Cathedral. After visiting St. Patrick's gravesite at Downpatrick and Saul Church, they traveled to the Antrim Coast and Corrymeela Retreat Center. The group explored Ballycastle, toured the Old Bushmills Distillery, and visited the Giant's Causeway.

In Dublin, they saw the Book of Kells, visited St. Patrick's Cathedral, and had a final dinner with Irish music at Merchants Arch. The pilgrimage ended with a smooth return flight to Atlanta.

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who made this journey possible, especially to Rev. Emily Miller for originating and organizing the trip. It was a transformative experience that deepened the connection to both the land and a shared spiritual journey. The trip left a lasting impact, inspiring new perspectives on Celtic spirituality and community.





# W E L C O M E

## WE ARE GROWING!

We welcomed three new members to our church family in November!  
If you see them, please make them feel welcome!  
If you are interested in membership, please contact Sharon Barber in the church office.



Susie Reuter



Darla Whitlock



Tres Whitlock



## ORIGIN OF OUR ADVENT CANDLE WREATH STAND

by Susie Wardrop, SPC member

In the mid 1970s, our church sponsored its first Vietnamese family. Church member Dave Genter flew our pastor Jack Maxwell to Indian Town Gap (PA), a refugee center, to choose a family. Suong Nhiem, a major in the South Vietnam Air Force, his wife, Phong, and their two children, Trac (six years old) and Hang (four years old) arrived in Sewickley to settle into our community.

Suong, whose hobby was woodworking, presented our church with our current Advent Wreath Stand. Now nearly 50 years later we still enjoy using this stand during our Advent services.

Those of us who were there fondly remember the Nhiem family. They are currently living outside of Houston. Trac and Hang have both graduated from medical school! This "refugee" family fondly remembers our church's generosity.





# STEWARDSHIP

*“God loves a cheerful giver”*

## **GIVING TO THE CHURCH IN A CHARITABLE REMAINDER TRUST**

By Shelley Newlin, SPC member

A charitable remainder trust (CRT) can be a powerful tool for giving to the church while also providing potential financial benefits for the donor. Here’s a brief overview of how it works:

1. **\*\*Setting Up a CRT:\*\*** The donor (you) transfers assets, such as cash, securities, or real estate, into an irrevocable trust. The trust then pays you, or other named beneficiaries, a fixed annual income or a percentage of the trust’s assets for life or a specified term.
2. **\*\*Tax Benefits:\*\*** When you fund the CRT, you may qualify for a charitable income tax deduction based on the present value of the remainder interest that the charity will receive upon your death or the end of the trust term. Additionally, if you fund the CRT with appreciated assets like stocks or real estate, you can avoid immediate capital gains tax on the sale of those assets.
3. **\*\*Income Payments:\*\*** The CRT pays you (or other beneficiaries) income for life or a specified term. This income can be a fixed amount (annuity trust) or a percentage of the trust assets valued annually (unitrust).
4. **\*\*Remainder to Charity:\*\*** When the trust terminates (upon your death or the end of the trust term), the remaining assets are distributed to the charity or charities you’ve designated.
5. **\*\*Benefits to the Church:\*\*** By naming your church as the charitable beneficiary of the CRT, you can provide it with a significant future gift while also receiving income during your lifetime.
6. **\*\*Professional Advice:\*\*** Setting up a CRT can be complex, so it’s essential to work with a qualified estate planning attorney or financial advisor who can help you understand the implications for your financial situation and charitable goals.

Before proceeding with a CRT, make sure to consult with professionals who can provide personalized advice based on your specific circumstances and goals.



## LEADERSHIP TRAINING

By Gretchen Burnham, SPC Deacon

In September, Suzanne Morrison and I attended the *Equipping, Empowering, Engaging Leadership Training* at the Pittsburgh Presbytery. It was wonderful sitting in a room of Deacons from area churches listening and participating with them in two breakout sessions.

In the first session, “How Do I Care for My Congregation,” Rev. Louise Rogers handed out a paper with COMPASSIONATE CARE typed down the left side. She went down each letter of the words and gave triggers for each letter: C: Christ like ministry, O: focus on Others, M: Make time to listen, etc. She also handed out a sheet entitled “Don’t Sing Songs to a Heavy Heart” and two sheets with sentences of scriptures and prayers that may be helpful when calling or visiting congregants.

In the second session we focused on “Remarkable Ways Deacons Serve.” Our leader handed out four additional sheets and we reviewed them together.

After the training, I encouraged our Deacons to review the information Suzanne and I were given. We were all about to meet and discuss the *Remarkable Ways Deacons Serve*. There are so many ways we can make a difference in our church family.

With grateful thanks for being an SPC deacon -- we are here to serve!



## MELT ME, MOLD ME, FILL ME, USE ME

By Joanna Freel, SPC member

As a new member of the Sewickley Presbyterian Church, I attended the Women’s Retreat at the Antiochian Village with my daughter Andrea Freel. The theme of the retreat was “Melt Me, Mold Me, Fill Me, Use Me.” I wasn’t certain how this theme would work or inspire me in my daily life and as a new member. Both Andrea and I knew many women in advance of our attendance. The warmth and caring of the women who attended the retreat immediately put our nervousness at bay. My daughter and I never felt as if we were strangers, as it was a circle of women of all ages coming together in sisterhood. The accommodations were great and the food was so incredible (it was great not having to think what can we have for dinner!) Thank you all for your warm welcome!

Rachel Fagan led the retreat work of “Melt me, Mold me, Fill me, Use Me” which was a very empowering experience that let us speak to our inner issues of the many robes we all wear as women of faith. As Rachel stated, “God the Potter can be trusted to shape us, mold us, and bring meaning and purpose to our lives, but to do that, we must place ourselves in His hands”.

Women’s retreats can be a transformative and empowering experience. They can provide a space for rejuvenation, reflection, and bonding, and allow women to nurture their minds, bodies, and spirits. I encourage women of our church to attend next years retreat, come with an open mind and heart – it is a most rewarding experience.





# WE BET YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES!



By Janet Lee, Worship & Music Committee

While attending our worship services, you may notice our ushers greeting people at the door or walking up the aisles with offering plates and wonder what they do behind the scenes. The truth is – ushering is easy, takes very little time and is a joyful way to serve. Best of all, anyone can do it, including you!

Ushering is your chance to meet new people in our congregation and to be the first friendly face that welcomes everyone to worship. Since we are always in need of ushers to support our worship services, we have just launched a new program to invite you to sign up to usher and provide some resources to show you how. Try it yourself or with a friend or family member! There is a [one minute training video](#) on the website, and some more detailed instructions as well. We will also offer live training sessions from time to time and any time upon request. In a nutshell though, ushering takes little more time than attending church and involves greeting people, collecting the offering, tending to the congregation during services and tidying up after.

Please help support this important ministry. If you are ready to sign up, input your name and email address for the particular service at which you will serve on the Events and Sign Ups page on our [website](#). If you have questions, reach out to us at [info@se-wicklepresby.org](mailto:info@se-wicklepresby.org) or call 412.741.4550 and we can answer your questions or help pair you with a buddy to help you get started. After you have ushered, we will occasionally call out to the email list to fill any ushering slots as needed.

Thank you and see you at SPC!



## JOIN OUR CHOIR?

By Michael Hammer, Director of Music Ministries

I've been at this church for the better part of two years, and written several articles for this newsletter, but not one of them has contained the words "join our choir!" If I don't want to lose my musician's license (whatever that is) I'd better get on that soon!

And as it happens, January is really a great time to join. It's the beginning of a new semester and with Christmas just ending, the music is not going to be very difficult. As I write this we are about to sing a very challenging piece by Bach for our Word Sung service. I wouldn't blame you if you were worried about joining a group that always sings music like that! But we don't. There is a wide variety of pieces in our folders, and there is also a team of professional singers with great leadership skills and warm humanity to help the rest of us along. You've heard of a teaching hospital? We're sort of a teaching choir. And we don't just sing. We eat! And have parties! And care about each other. You really should experience that part.

By the way, if you join the choir by February, you will also get a chance to work with another fabulous choral director as part of our semi-annual series of choral retreats. Last semester, Dr. Susan Rice of the University of Pittsburgh showed us why she is so loved and respected as a choral director with a batch of fresh insights and reinforcements—and she had us sounding GREAT by the end of that rehearsal! This time out Susan Medley from the Pittsburgh Concert Chorale will join us. You don't know how great it is to work with the best choir directors in our area until you've done it at least once.

The world seems to be changing pretty fast these days and our stress levels seem to be going up. There are all kinds of studies and memes and people I could quote about the wonderful effects of choral singing. It can feed the soul of the singers in a way few things in life can. And you are feeding the souls of those to whom you are singing in a very unique and powerful way. Who wouldn't want to have that great privilege?

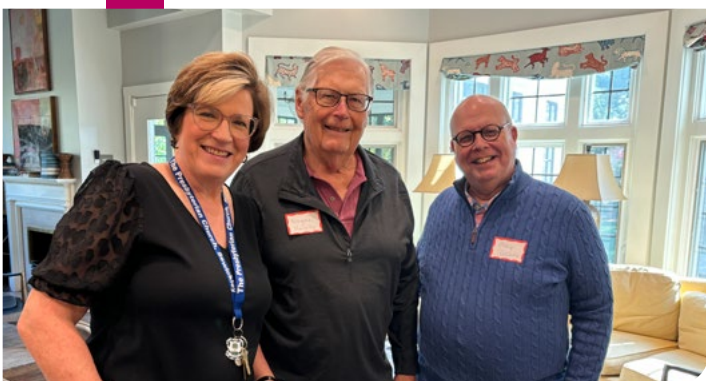
But life has also grown pretty busy these days, and I am sure many of you are thinking of the near impossibility of adding something to your schedules. This is where I really want to be in dialogue with the congregation during the next semester. The reality is that it is harder and harder for people to commit to just about anything, even if it has such a positive effect on your well-being. Who has the time for choral self-care when we are so busy looking after everyone else?

I'd particularly like to hear from you if you can complete this sentence:

*I'd love to join the choir BUT \_\_\_\_\_.*

What is in the blank? Is there a way to re-imagine what we are doing now so that it continues to effectively minister to the singers and the community? What does that look like as we head into the next decade? Can we honor our traditions and recognize the importance of this time and this special moment in time? Stay tuned.





## COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS

By Elizabeth Szuba, Director of Congregational Care

At the end of each year, we often enjoy watching Christmas movies. Just recently White Christmas was playing in the background while my husband and I decorated our Christmas tree.

For some reason, the song, “Count Your Blessings”, has continued to play in my head. When I think about the last couple of months, there has been much to cause concern— trouble in the Middle East, a contentious election and divided nation, friends struggling with illness, and loved ones dying. It is easy to worry instead of counting blessings. And, yet, I am filled with hope. I think that is the blessing of faith and the privilege of working with the Congregational Care Ministry (CCM).

This past fall we were lucky to have three amazing Evergreens events thanks to church members who shared their gifts and talents. Carrie Beynon taught us how to design beautiful fall flower arrangements, Tim Merrill educated us on the beautiful stained glass windows that adorn our church sanctuary, and Jan Wendt shared how to prepare for end of life at a lunch and learn entitled, “Talking About Death Won’t Kill You.” In addition to all the fun and educational activities this fall, we trained and commissioned four new Congregational Care Ministers (CCMs): Craig Dobbins, Gretchen McAdams, Wayne Murphy, and Jane Raymond. The training offered us an opportunity to welcome new members, develop important skills, and reflect on the growth of CCM over the last two years.

We look forward to God at work in and through this ministry in 2025.







# AN AMAZING FALL SEASON!

By Nicole Quaka, Children's Ministry Coordinator

**Fall Classes:** As we continue to be blessed with more and more children, we have been excited to offer classes to accommodate ages birth to 5<sup>th</sup> grade; classes that will meet their needs developmentally and spiritually.

**Check-In/Out Stickers:** With the increase in children this year, we have started a new check in/check out system. Parents can find stickers for their children in the pews as well as in the childcare room. Parents fill out the child's information on one side and put that sticker on their child. They keep the other half to turn in when they pick their children up at the end of their time at SPC. This new system has allowed us to provide increased safety and programs for the growing number of children in our church.

## 9 AM Children's Church Service

*Birth to Pre-K | Kindergarten-3<sup>rd</sup> Grade | 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> Grade*

Our youngest members enjoy free play with songs, stories, and crafts in. Children in this age group have been learning the fruits of the spirit alongside the congregation this fall with Miss Hanna in the studios.

At 9 and 11 AM, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students are invited to stay in the service. There are clipboards with sermon notes at each entrance to help them engage with the sermon.

## 10 AM Sunday School/Children's Choir

*Birth to age 3 | Pre-Kindergarten | Kindergarten-2<sup>nd</sup> Grade | 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> Grade*

Childcare is available with our caring childcare staff Brittney Ellis, Abby Johnson, and Emma Leghorn during the 9, 10, and 11 AM services.

Our Pre-K children spend the first half of Sunday School in the Childcare room with crafts and free play. The second half of Sunday School is spent in our choir room learning choir performance songs.

Our Kindergarten to 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students spend half of their time in Bible Lessons with Miss Hanna in the Studios and the other half in choir lessons with Mr. Jeremy Fisher, our children's choir director in the Choir room on the Mezzanine level.

3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> graders start off their time in Choir and finish up their time digging deeper into Bible studies with Ms. Nicole in the Studios.

Our Children's Choir is in their second year with Mr. Jeremy with practices at 10 AM on Sundays. They have performed for Reformation Sunday on October 27, Word Sung\* on December 8, and the Christmas Pageant.

continued on next page...







*\*Twenty-one SPC Kids dressed in purple robes, stood on the pulpit loft to sing Bach's Christmas Oratorio alongside Ray Blackwell and musicians from the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra on Sunday, December 8. The contrast of voices between Ray and the children was truly angelic as they helped bring the birth of Jesus to life through the Word Sung performance. Children's Ministries is exceedingly thankful to our Children's Choir Director Jeremy Fisher and Dr. Michael Hammer for all the wonderful work they did to help the children accomplish this challenging piece.*



### **11 AM Children's Church**

*Birth to age 3 | Pre-K to Kindergarten | 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> Grade*

Childcare with stories, songs, and crafts are available in our childcare room/nursery. This class is designed to explore God's Word through songs, imaginative play, and hands-on exploration. These children have been learning the fruits of the spirit led by Nicole Quaka and Erin Leghorn. This children's church class has been learning the fruits of the spirit through Bible lessons and hands on activities with Hanna Mellor.



**Club 345:** Our after-school program for 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> graders hit the ground running this year with already 14 children attending each week. These thoughtful students have been learning different skills to help spread the love of Christ with others. We have learned about and participated in mission projects for Knitting for Mission, Center for Hope, Neighbors in Need, and Animal Friends. As our attendees each week continue to grow, we are welcoming snack donations as the year goes on. Please reach out to Nicole Quaka if you would like to donate snacks for Club 345.



**Fall Family Festival:** We had our Fall Family Festival on October 25 with over 15 families bringing food to share for this potluck event. From grandparents to small children, we had almost 50 people attend. We all enjoyed games, crafts, and fellowship in the Faith House lounge in what truly felt like a special family gathering with relaxed conversation and good food while the kids played and had fun.



**Kids' Night Out:** Twenty children aged preschool to grade 5 left their parents at home on November 22 to enjoy a holiday pajama party at church. They played games, ate pizza, decorated gingerbread houses, and made ornaments for the upcoming holiday season.

**Christmas Pageant:** Our annual Christmas Pageant was held on December 22 during the 11 AM service. Children aged preschool to 12<sup>th</sup> grade participated. Youth in middle and high school had speaking roles, while SPC Kids in preschool to 5<sup>th</sup> grade had speaking and singing roles. Our SPC Kids worked hard each Sunday in choir to practice Christmas Pageant songs and were happy for another exciting year where they were able to share the birth of Christ with their church family.



**Children's Ministry Update:** We are so thankful to still have Hanna Mellor teaching on Sundays and helping with special events this year, even as she is working hard to finish her graduate program and pursue her career in child psychology. As her schedule has changed Nicole Quaka and Erin Leghorn will be continuing to coordinate Children's Ministries. If you have any Children's Ministry questions, please direct them to Nicole Quaka at [nquaka@sewickleypresby.org](mailto:nquaka@sewickleypresby.org).





# OUR YOUTH ON THE GO



By Rev. Mike Creamer  
Associate Pastor for Youth & Young Adults

The fall semester was filled with plenty of fun, fellowship, and opportunities to grow together with our teens. Our Confirmation and Middle School Sunday School programs have given way to plenty of topics to discuss as we explored the nuances of our faith. The high school breakfast Bible study on Thursday mornings continues to expand, leaving very little sitting room for anyone else at Starbucks (If you ever stop in to see us, make sure to say hello!). We were also excited to make our return to Laurelville with our high school students, where we had plenty to keep us busy over the weekend—from mud sports and painting crafts to scavenger hunts and worship at club. It's always great to get to camp with the PKF.

We started our Youth Hangs program where we had monthly activities with deep dives on various faith topics. Our focus was the book of James, while the events varied from month to month. We had our 9-square in the air night, Pickleball Party in the parking lot, Cozy Campfire, and we wrapped things up with our annual Christmas Party at the Faith House. The youth sub-committee was integral in making these events happen, and it's a great reminder of the impact and importance of having adults that care about our teens involved in their lives. As we look ahead to the winter months of January and beyond, we have a couple big things on the horizon (especially for our middle schoolers), so be on the lookout as details come out!







## A BUSY FALL

By Erin Leghorn, Director of FriendShip Preschool

We've had a great start to this school year! We have 61 students enrolled this year from Children's Corner through Pre-K. Our children have already taken part in several fun activities this year such as:

*Visits with members of the  
Sewickley Fire Department and Police Department*

*Field trips to Fern Hollow Nature Center*

*Monthly story time from the Sewickley Public Library  
through the library outreach program*

*Walking field trips to the pumpkin patch at  
Sewickley United Methodist Church*

*Trick-or-Treating through the church office*

*Chapel Time in the fall months  
with Rev. Davenport, Mr. Jeremy, Pastor Mike,  
Miss Nicole & Dr. Hammer*

Our students also helped with our Christmas Food Baskets by bringing in donations.

Registration for the '25-26' school year begins this month!



# TRUE BLESSINGS

By Gretchen Burnham, SPC Deacon

We are beyond blessed with a loving and caring church family. We have many who give their time and energy to ensuring we are well taken care of in many ways. A particular group who helps is our amazing Deacons! In 2024, we had 22 deacons. They were busy throughout the year and deeply involved in many aspects and events of our church.

We look forward to installing our newest deacons on January 26, but check out some highlights from 2024 below:

**Flowers:** Most Sundays a family donates the Sanctuary flower arrangement in memory or in honor of someone and requests the deacons deliver the flowers to members of the congregation mourning the loss of a loved one, celebrating the birth of a child or dealing with or recovering from health issues, etc.

**Correspondence:** Our deacons send cards to those in need of an uplifting note or a note of congratulations, etc.

**Meal Coordination:** *Take Them a Meal* is an easy way to organize meals for friends. Several families received meals for a week or more during a time of recovery from an illness or surgery, etc. in 2024!

**Masonic Village:** An Afternoon Tea was held on April 23, 2024 as residents, deacons, and church staff members gathered to enjoy lemonade and cookies.

**Easter Brunch:** The Hospitality Committee asked for help from the Deacons and our Membership Committee with the Easter Brunch after all three worship services.

**Blanket Sunday(s):** May 5 and May 12 we held Blanket Sunday which is a nationwide event spon-

sored by Church World Service. A donation of \$10 provides a blanket and supplies for homeless individuals and victims of natural disasters. This year we exceeded the goal of 200 Blankets, raising \$2955.

**Deacon Picnic and Derek's Installation:** On Sunday, May 19, 2024 our Deacons and SPC's Hospitality Committee planned and organized the food and activities on this great day.

**Backpacks in July:** Deacons oversaw this project of gathering new backpacks and school supplies for children at the Center for Hope. Our church supplied 67 Elementary School Backpacks and 40 for Junior and Senior High School students. Our deacons distributed them at Center for Hope on August 1, 2024. And extra \$1000 raised was donated to Center for Hope to be spent on helping "hungry kids snacks."

**Christmas Food Baskets:** We provided 98 Christmas Food Baskets which consisted of donated food items from our congregation. The Packing Party was on December 13, 2024 in the Robinson Room and Distribution on Saturday December 14, 2024. Local grocer, Safran's, provided perishable items including freshly baked chocolate chip cookies. Church members volunteered to assist at Safran's by delivering food to cars, bringing baskets to recipients' homes, and also by distributing baskets at SPC and the Center for Hope.

**Tree of Memories/Longest Night Service:** Church members purchase ornaments in memory of a loved one and hang them on the tree in the Chapel during the service. If they were unable to attend the service, deacons placed the ornaments on the tree. The ornaments were then moved to trees in the sanctuary for Christmas Eve.





## A LONG LIST

By Jennifer Johnson, Director of Communications

Each year, our Mission Committee is honored to receive countless expressions of gratitude from the organizations we support. Below is a sampling of organizations that have shared heartfelt thanks for our church family's generosity and support in 2024:

- Greater PGH Community Food Bank
- Center for Hope
- Diaconia ECCB
- Light of Life Rescue Mission
- Ligonier Camp & Conference Center
- St. Matthews AME Zion Church
- Genesis of Pittsburgh
- Union Aid Society
- The Ladle & the Hearth
- The Blessing Board
- Locking Arms Men
- PS(USA) Disaster Assistance
- Medical Benevolence Foundation
- Open Hands Ministry
- Crestfield Camp & Conference Center
- Women's Center & Shelter of PGH
- Water Mission
- Jewish Federation of Greater PGH
- Eastern Mennonite University
- Bethlehem Haven
- Deep Springs International
- Sojourner House
- Beaver County Humane Society
- Brother's Brother Foundation
- Global Links
- Off the Floor Furniture
- Faith in Action/YMCA
- Meals on Wheels

# DAY ON THE LAWN

## 2024 FINAL NUMBERS!

**Gross Income**  
\$75,378

**Underwriting**  
\$21,424

**Expenses**  
\$25,849

**TOTAL FOR MISSION**  
\$70,953



## MANY THANKS

By SPC Neighbors in Need Committee

A huge thank you to all who donated personal care items in our October Neighbors in Need drive. Our mission partners are so grateful for your support. We had extra help from the children in our Club 345 who sorted items and filled boxes that were delivered to the Center for Hope, the Ladle, Sewickley Community Center, and the Sewickley YMCA little free pantry program.





**POINTING  
TO THE CROSS**  
I Corinthians 2:2





## CAPITAL CAMPAIGN: UPDATE

By Mark Gensheimer, SPC Member

As we have almost reached the end of our Stewardship season, we now move into the next phase of the capital campaign. We have put together an expanded capital campaign committee to help with outreach to the congregation and another to lead the construction phase of the project. Our hope is to have all pledges in by the end of March, so that we can start working on the initial sanctuary projects in June.

Please prayerfully consider making a pledge as we focus on these three areas – hospitality, access, and safety. This is our chance to continue the ministry of our congregation in new and exciting ways.

Pledges can be made on our website under the Give tab, or you may submit a pledge to Laura Mikush in the church office.

We will continue to give regular updates as we move forward into 2025. Please contact one of the individuals below with any questions:

- ▶ Mark Gensheimer: [mgensheimer@csmckee.com](mailto:mgensheimer@csmckee.com)
- ▶ Malcolm Nimick: [malcolm.nimick@gmail.com](mailto:malcolm.nimick@gmail.com)
- ▶ Rev. Dr. Derek Davenport: [ddavenport@sewickleypresby.org](mailto:ddavenport@sewickleypresby.org)

---

### CAPITAL CAMPAIGN GOAL

**\$3,000,000**

### PLEDGES RECEIVED AS OF DECEMBER 2024

**\$1,300,000**





Sewickley Presbyterian Church

**LIVE · GROW · SERVE**

414 Grant Street | Sewickley, PA | 15143

[www.sewickleypresby.org](http://www.sewickleypresby.org)

**Dated Material**  
**PLEASE EXPEDITE**

This newsletter is published by  
Sewickley Presbyterian Church



## **MEET RICI BROCKINSON**

By Jennifer Johnson, Director of Communications



Many of you may not have met Rici (“Ricky”) Brockinson in person, but you’ve almost certainly benefitted from the work she does for our church. If you’ve ever followed the slides during worship, listened to a sermon podcast, used a bulletin, or worshiped online, you’ve seen her in action. Rici is the one behind the scenes producing our live-stream services every Sunday morning, ensuring that everyone at home can join in worship. Much of her work takes place in our Tech Studio, just below the sanctuary, where she makes sure the online experience runs smoothly. She produces not only our worship broadcasts and our various worship media, like slides, bulletins, and podcasts.

Rici has been part of our team for several years, working in a part-time role, but as of January 1, we are thrilled to announce that she is now full-time! In addition to producing the live-stream services, Rici will continue to play a key role in our worship services, provide technical audio/visual support throughout the week, and help drive our ongoing digital efforts.

If you’ve never had the chance to meet Rici, we encourage you to stop by the office Monday through Thursday and say “hello!” Her office is located just behind the reception area.