

SEPTEMBER 2026

SUNSET HILLS MESSENGER

UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

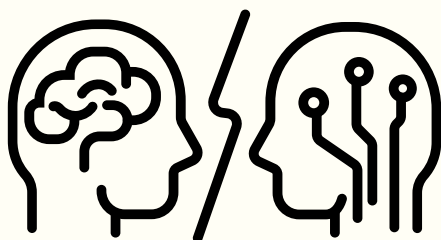
Photograph by Ryan Gracey

A MESSAGE FROM PASTOR LAURA



“I do not think I will ever reach a stage when I will say, ‘This is what I believe. Finished.’ What I believe is alive.” – Madeleine L’Engle

Artificial intelligence can write your grocery list, help diagnose a disease, generate a picture of Jesus riding a velociraptor, and apparently convince perfectly reasonable people that putting glue on pizza is a good idea. It even wrote this opening sentence! But what does AI have to do with church? Quite a lot, actually!



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SUNSET HILLS UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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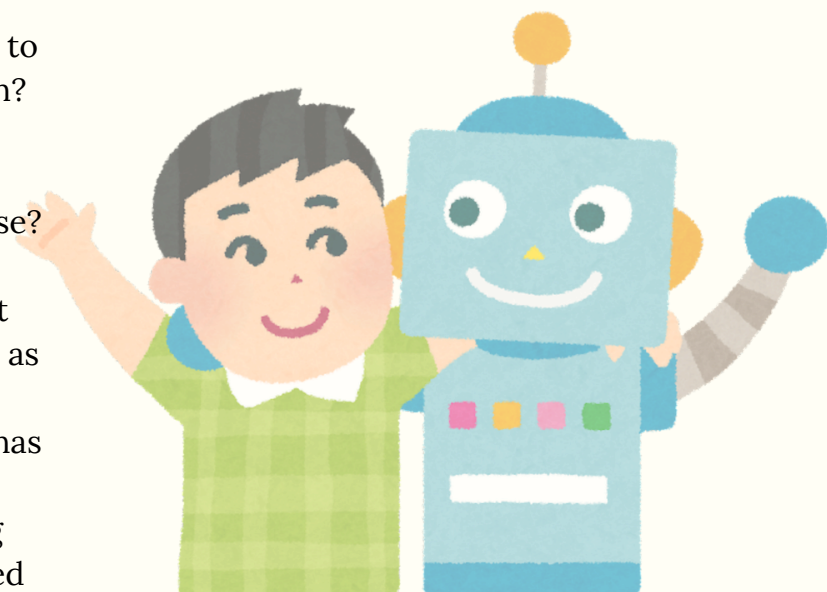
Office Hours:
Monday, Tuesday and Thursday
9 am - 2 pm

This new technological season invites the faithful to ask big questions: What does it mean to be human? What is intelligence? Is creating something uniquely human? What happens to truth when a machine can convincingly produce something false? What happens to work and dignity? Where do justice and inequality enter the picture? And what responsibilities do we have toward our neighbors as technology changes their lives?

These aren't entirely new questions. The church has been figuring out how to live faithfully alongside new technology for a very long time. The printing press transformed the way Christians encountered Scripture. Radio and television changed the way we communicated and worshiped. The internet changed how we form communities, seek information, and decide whom to trust. Each new technology has brought tremendous possibilities alongside real reasons for caution. AI is no different. The technology may be new, but the Christian task is ancient: to seek what is true, love what is good, protect the vulnerable, and ask how our choices affect our neighbors.

And Christians ought to be curious people. Jesus himself asked questions constantly: *What are you looking for? Who do you say that I am? What do you want me to do for you? Which of these was a neighbor?* Again and again, Jesus invited people to reconsider what they thought they already knew. Faithfulness does not require certainty about everything we encounter.

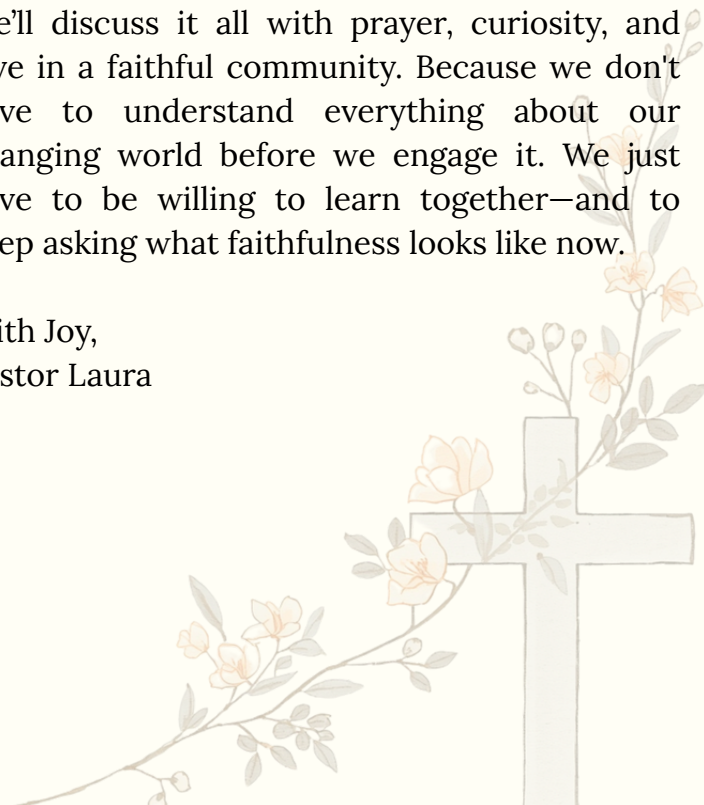
The church should be one of the places where we can ask difficult questions without first knowing the correct answer. Faith doesn't require us to retreat from a changing world. It gives us a community in which to encounter that world thoughtfully, ethically, courageously—and with a little humility. We can disagree. We can wonder. We can even change our minds. And we can keep asking what love of God and love of neighbor require of us here and now.



So as our children head back to classrooms this fall, I'm inviting you to come learn with me. I will be hosting a monthly Faith and the World: Cookie Chat to discuss the big topics of our time. We're discussing Artificial Intelligence and the Christian Faith on Sunday, September 13, from 7:00–8:30 p.m. in the church library.

I'll provide the cookies. You're invited to bring your own warm beverage. You're also invited to bring your curiosity! Bring the things you've read that fascinated you about AI and the things that scared the daylights out of you. Bring your questions, your opinions, and your uncertainty. We'll discuss it all with prayer, curiosity, and love in a faithful community. Because we don't have to understand everything about our changing world before we engage it. We just have to be willing to learn together—and to keep asking what faithfulness looks like now.

With Joy,
Pastor Laura





*"Next to the Word of God,
the noble art of music is
the greatest treasure in the
world."*

-Martin Luther

MUSIC NOTES

SHELBY GRACEY, MUSIC DIRECTOR

A heartfelt "Thank You!" goes out to everyone who gave of their time and talent to offer special music for worship this summer. We welcomed a new guest, Declan Rooney (Jeff Allison's neighbor), who played his cello, and it's always nice to have Harriet Rickard's daughter, Becky, visit us from Southminster Presbyterian Church to sing a duet with her mom. We're also thankful to GPM and many other choir members who shared their talents; as well as to Ryan Gracey & Carla Robinson who operated the clavinova while I was away on vacation.

On behalf of the Music & Worship Commission, I'd also like to express our appreciation for our elders Dave Petty, Chip McCoy, and Ryan Gracey who led us in worship this summer on weeks when Pastor Laura was on the mission trip and vacation. And in addition, thanks to Rev. Ralph Lowe, from Pittsburgh Presbytery, and to Rev. Marlaena Cochran (a Presbyterian Pastor and Hospice Chaplain who has been worshipping with us whenever she's not preaching elsewhere.) It takes many people to keep our worship services vibrant and meaningful, and we thank everyone for their contributions to make that happen!

While it seems that we just started our summer break, it's already time for the Chancel & Bell Choir seasons to resume for the Fall! Our first rehearsal for the Chancel Choir will be held on **Tuesday, September 8 at 7:30 p.m., in the choir room**, and the first time to sing in worship will be on Sunday, September 13. We always have room for MORE choir members, and we'd love to have you join us! Feel free to contact me if you have an interest in joining the choir.

The Campanile Bells will also resume on **Tuesday, September 8 at 6:30 p.m. in the choir room**. We look forward to ringing several times throughout the fall and Advent/Christmas season.

We're all looking forward to a wonderful new season of offering up our praises to God by "making a joyful noise" – either through singing, ringing, or playing instruments!



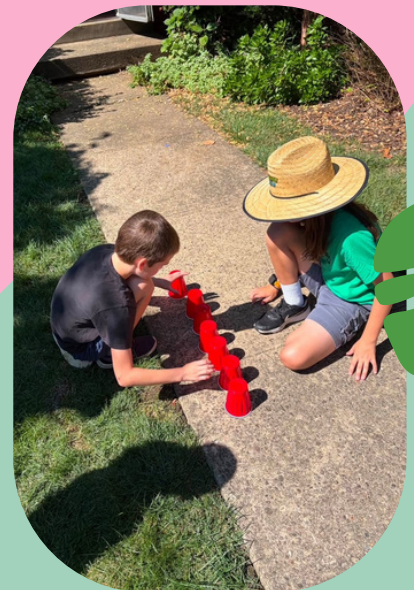
Vacation Bible School

August 2026



The fun we had...

Our church was overflowing with energy, laughter, music, and plenty of rainforest fun during Rainforest Falls VBS! We welcomed 37 children for a week of Bible stories, games, crafts, science, music, mission, and more as we learned together about God's love. VBS could not happen without the community of volunteers who gave their time to our kids. From decorating and preparing behind the scenes to leading groups and activities all week long, you made Rainforest Falls possible. Thank you!





MISSION TRIP



DISASTER RELIEF TRIP: EASTERN TENNESSEE

By Pastor Laura Strauss

Disaster Relief Trip: This July, Sunset Hills traveled to eastern Tennessee to serve communities still recovering from the devastation of Hurricane Helene. Our team spent the week working alongside local organizations and residents, lending our hands through hunger relief and home restoration in response to the disaster.

Thank you to everyone who traveled, prayed, donated, and supported this ministry from home. Disaster recovery continues long after the news cameras leave. We are grateful for the opportunity to show up as neighbors and put our faith into action.





Join us after worship for...

A PRESENTATION BY

HER SAFE HAVEN

Findlay Hall

Her Safe Haven is a local organization that provides women WITH comprehensive support for healing through housing, recovery support, and trauma-informed care.

Learn more at hersafehaven.org

SEPT. 20

11:15 A.M.

Join Us!

Refreshments will be provided
by the Mission Commission.



SUNSET HILLS U.P. CHURCH
900 COUNTRY CLUB DRIVE

Reformation Sunday



BRING AN ITEM THAT SYMBOLIZES YOUR HERITAGE TO
PLACE ON THE COMMUNION TABLE.

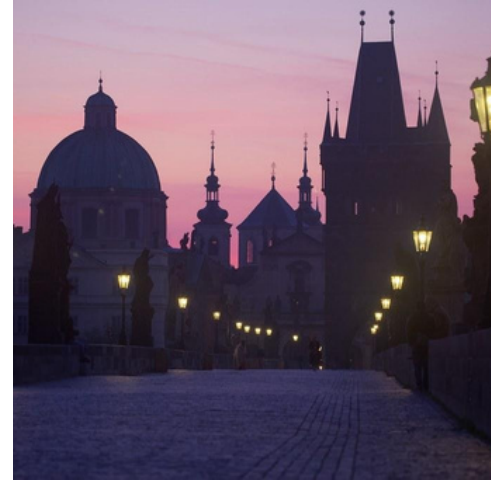
ALL FAMILIES WILL RECEIVE A HOUSEHOLD BLESSING.

*Sunday
October 25
10:15 a.m.*

*Celebrate our Presbyterian
Scottish heritage and each of
our own unique ancestries!*

All Shall Be Well Journeys

Women Traveling with Women
Living in Simplicity and the Sacred
Led by Rebecca DePoe and Laura Strauss



Thresholds and Towers: A Czech Pilgrimage

Monday, May 10, 2027 - Thursday, May 20, 2027

Sacred History

Join a circle of eight women for a transformative pilgrimage through Prague—city of spires, stories, and resilience. Living in intentional simplicity, we will explore the religious history of Prague from its early Christian foundations to the bold witness of the Reformation, including



two nights in the Medieval village of Cesky Krumlov.

Spiritual Architecture

We will walk ancient cobblestone streets and pause in hushed sanctuaries. We'll listen for the echoes of Jan Hus, consider the radical courage of Czech Protestants, and dwell in the sacred memory of the Jewish Quarter.

Shared Sisterhood

This pilgrimage is about more than travel. It's about slowing down, opening up, and being shaped by place, history, and community. Part of the slowing down will be the conclusion of the pilgrimage in the

medieval village of Cesky Krumlov. Through shared meals, daily prayer, and guided reflection, we will bear witness to God's presence across time—and in each other.

Itinerary

Monday, May 10: Depart Pittsburgh for Prague

Tuesday, May 11: Arrive in Prague, Welcome Czech Folklore Dinner

Wednesday, May 12: Prague Castle/Monastery, Evening Mysteries of Prague Walk

Thursday, May 13: Day Trip to Kutna Hora and St. Barbara Cathedral

Friday, May 14: Morning Jewish Quarter and Museum, Evening Concert

Saturday, May 15: Day Trip to Terezin Fortress and Concentration Camp

Sunday, May 16: Morning Worship, Free Afternoon in Prague

Monday, May 17: Morning Train to Medieval Village, Cesky Krumlov, Free Afternoon

Tuesday, May 18: Tour of Cesky Krumlov Monasteries and Retreat Afternoon

Wednesday, May 19: Morning Train to Prague, Free Afternoon in Prague

COST: \$3000

The above includes required books, daily breakfast and dinner, accommodations, train tickets, public transportation/car transportation to local sites, and admission costs. Cost **does not** include airfare, tax, gratuities, or alcohol. A deposit of \$500 is due by October 16, 2026 to reserve a spot for this trip. Spaces are first-come, first served. Contact Rev. Rebecca DePoe or Rev. Dr. Laura Strauss (revlaurastrauss@gmail.com, 412-956-9438) with questions.

THANK YOU

Dear Saints of Sunset Hills,
The Pittsburgh Presbytery
lifted your congregation to
God in prayer this week. Thank
you for your faithful witness
and service to the Kingdom.

Ben Jones
Carla
Lisa
Ralph
Elizabeth

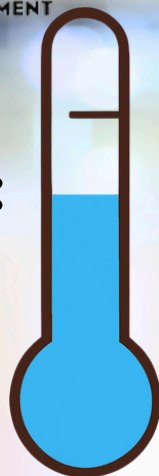
July 24, 2026
Dear friends of Sunset
Hills Church. Thank you
for the beautiful altar
flowers that Janet
Richard brought me.
We had an enjoyable
visit together.
I am so grateful
to be a member
of such a loving
congregation.

Wendy
McCallough

We are so blessed and grateful for the wonderful team here at Sunset Hills United Presbyterian Church. Each person brings their time, talents, and dedication to help make our church community a welcoming and meaningful place. We truly appreciate all that our team does and give thanks to God for the many ways they serve and support our church family.



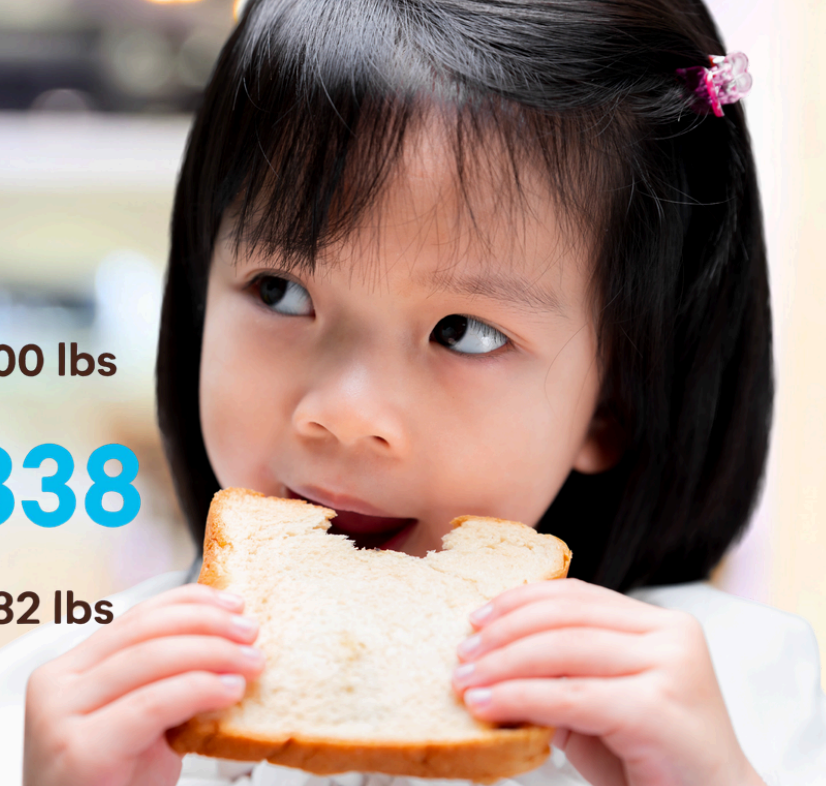
**Sunset Hill's 2026
Food Contribution:**
338lbs



500 lbs

338

282 lbs



Most Needed Food Items

- Dried Beans
- Pasta
- Lentils
- Pasta Sauce Jars
- Cereal & Oatmeal
- Soup
- Condiments
- Spices
- Adult Diapers
- Infant Diapers (Size 4-6)
- Dog & Cat Food
- Personal Care Items

SHIM Clothing Closet

Accepting donations of in-season clothes, shoes, and linens. Please no large household items. Located at Church of the Nazarene, 5601 Library Road.

Drop-Off Hours:
Monday 10:00am - 1:00pm

If you are unable to deliver your donations, you can leave them in the closet outside of Findley Hall and a Mission Commission member will deliver them for you.

*Thank you for the diaper donations!
So far, 205 pounds of diapers and
wipes have been donated.*



HOLY CURIOSITY SERMON SERIES



The Bible is full of passages that make us laugh, scratch our heads, argue, wonder, and occasionally say, "Wait—that's in there?" This fall, Pastor Laura's turning to you. What Scripture have you never heard preached but wish you had? What story deserves another chance? What text has puzzled or inspired you?

Drop your suggestion in the basket in the narthex. Pastor Laura will use these suggestions for worship in September through November 2026. Together we'll explore some of the Bible's most surprising corners and discover what treasures await us there.



FAITH AND THE WORLD: COOKIE CHATS

SHUP

TALKS

13
SEPT

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Artificial intelligence is changing the way we work, learn, and relate. What wisdom does the Christian faith offer in this new era?

7:00 - 8:30 PM, Church Library

Led by Pastor Laura

11
OCT

DEATH AND DYING

Most of us avoid talking about death—until we can't. Let's explore what the Christian faith has to say about mortality, grief, and hope. From funeral homes to resurrection hope: How does the Christian story help us face death?

7:00 - 8:30 PM, Church Library

Led by Pastor Laura

8
NOV

CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

Can love of country and loyalty to Christ ever come into tension? Let's explore the question together. What happens when religious identity and national identity become difficult to distinguish?

7:00 - 8:30 PM, Church Library

Led by Pastor Laura

10
JAN

LONELINESS AND BELONGING

We're living through what some researchers call an epidemic of loneliness. What is loneliness doing to us, and what does the church have that social media, streaming services, and busy schedules cannot provide?

7:00 - 8:30 PM, Church Library

Led by Pastor Laura

Join Us!

Cookies will be provided. Bring your own coffee/tea/cocoa.

Monthly Recipe: Back to School Taco Bake

$$a^2 + b^2 = c^2$$



Busy school nights call for easy and delicious dinners! This simple Taco Bake is a family-friendly meal that can be prepared quickly and customized with your favorite toppings.

Ingredients

- 1 pound ground beef or ground turkey
- 1 packet taco seasoning
- 1 can diced tomatoes, drained
- 1 cup corn
- 2 cups shredded cheese
- 2 cups crushed tortilla chips
- Optional toppings: lettuce, sour cream, salsa, avocado, or tomatoes

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F.
2. Brown the ground beef or turkey in a skillet and drain any excess fat.
3. Stir in the taco seasoning, diced tomatoes, and corn.
4. Spread the mixture into a greased baking dish.
5. Sprinkle crushed tortilla chips over the top, followed by the shredded cheese.
6. Bake for 15–20 minutes, or until the cheese is melted and bubbly.
7. Serve with your favorite toppings and enjoy!

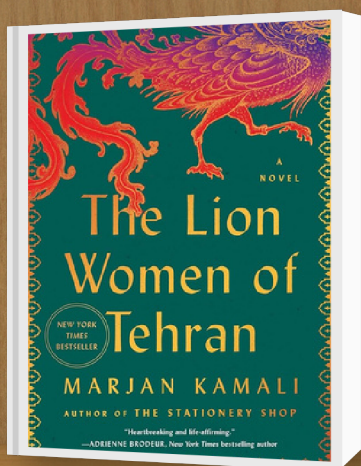
Perfect for a busy school night, this easy meal is sure to bring everyone to the table!



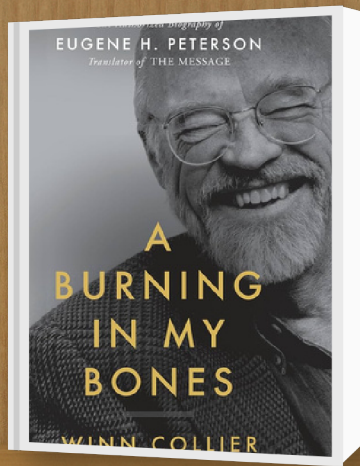


Book Club Picks

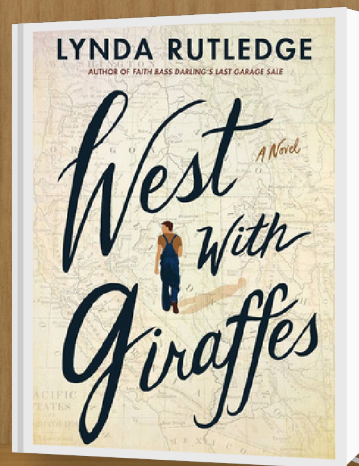
JOIN US FOR DISCUSSION WITH PASTOR LAURA ON THE LAST
WEDNESDAY OF EACH MONTH AT 7:30PM IN THE CHURCH
LIBRARY



September 30



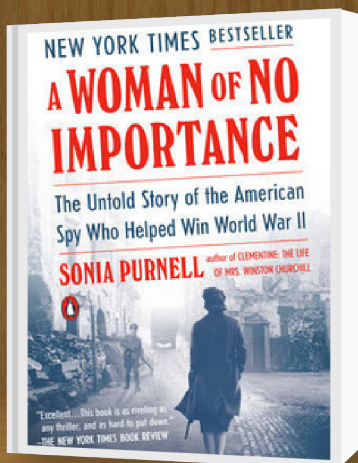
October 28



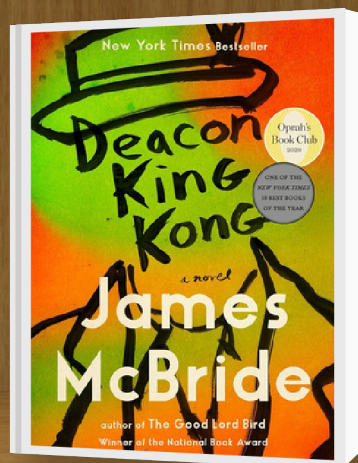
December 2



January 6



January 27



February 24

First Presbyterian Church's Annual Flea Market



**Saturday sept 26th
from 9am-2pm**

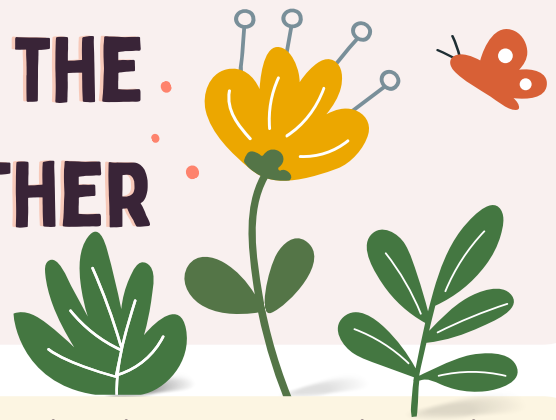
First Presbyterian Church of Castle Shannon

3636 Poplar Ave

Castle Shannon, Pittsburgh, 15234

Come and get some great bargains!

PET BLESSING BRINGS THE NEIGHBORHOOD TOGETHER



What a wonderful evening! Our Pet Blessing welcomed 24 dogs, 2 cats, and 1 very brave gecko, along with their humans, for an evening of gratitude for all God's creatures. It was especially wonderful to welcome neighbors from beyond our congregation. Thank you to everyone who helped make the evening possible—and to every furry, four-legged, and scaly guest who reminded us just how much love God's animals bring into our lives!



UPCOMING EVENTS

SUNDAYS

9:00 am Adult Sunday School – Findley Hall
9:00 am Children's Sunday School - Library
10:15 am Worship – Sanctuary
10:45 am Children's Church
2:00 pm Girl Scouts
4:00 pm Girl Scouts

MONDAYS

9:00 am Monday Marvels
1:00 pm Women's Bible Study

TUESDAYS

6:30 Handbell Choir - Choir Room
7:00 pm Square Dance Class – Crystal Hall
7:00 pm Counseling Group – Rm. 6
7:30 pm Choir - Choir Room

WEDNESDAYS

10:00 am Days for Girls – Wilson Hall
2:00 pm Parkinson's Group - Findley Hall
4:00 pm Quilters - Findley Hall

THURSDAYS

6:15 pm Fall Yoga

FRIDAYS

5:00 pm - AA

SPECIAL EVENTS

September 7: Labor Day - Office Closed

September 13 : Faith and The World 7:00 pm

September 20 : Her Safe Haven 11:15 am

September 30: Book Club 7:30 pm

INTERESTED IN TAKING PART IN AN UPCOMING EVENT?

Parkinson's Group

Contact Jeanine Hartman
412-215-2391

Peanut Squares Dancing Club

Everyone is welcome, no partner
or previous experience is
necessary. The cost is \$5/class.

UNABLE TO JOIN US IN PERSON FOR WORSHIP?

A video of the service is posted to
"Sunset Hills Church" Youtube channel
the Monday after the service. A copy of
the bulletin is available on the
homepage of www.shupchurch.org.

*"How very good and pleasant it is when kindred
live together in unity!"
— Psalm 133:1*

SEPTEMBER BIRTHDAYS PRAYER CIRCLE

1 Ryan Dawson
1 Declan Hoffman
1 Lisa Ursitz
5 Jeff Allison
5 Andrew Gracey
5 Meg MacDougall
7 Julie Martinez
11 Fritz Strauss
15 Matthew Fako
20 Carla Greenfield
22 Lily Weidensall
22 Amelia May Yates
25 David Arnold

September 6 Hanna Stimmel, Jeffrey Stimmel, Joanna Stimmel
September 13 Katy Stimmel, Marlene Stimmel, William Stimmel
September 20 Taylor Strang, Rebecca Simonic, Abbey Strang
September 27 Jennifer Strang, Thomas Strang, Travis Strang
October 4 Ethan Strauss, Fritz Strauss, Laura Strauss

PRAYER LIST

The Family of Mary Cutting
Jan Paulsen
The Van Haitsma family
Lisa Fako
Captain Sam Wright
Myra Mann
Rev. Brenda Barnes

Ron Sumner
Nancy Brumfield
Rev. Mark Adams and Miriam
Maldonado Escobar and their
children



Most Needed Food Items

- Dried Beans
- Pasta
- Lentils
- Pasta Sauce Jars
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- Soup
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- Spices
- Adult Diapers
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