



Sunset Hills

M E S S E N G E R

January 2024

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A Message from Pastor Laura

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" - John 11:25-26



Barbie asks on the big screen, "do you ever think about death?" I was struck by this line as I sat in the AMC theater. As a pastor, I think about death all the time. It is literally something I think about every single day. I am thinking about the death of Jesus, as well as his resurrection. I am thinking about those in our church who have died but whose influence carries on in my work. I am thinking about those church members who may be courting death's door. I am thinking about the family deaths impacting the preschoolers in our building. I am thinking about how we talk about death, address death, process death as Christians who affirm eternal life in the comforting arms of the Almighty. In other words, yes, Barbie, I do think about death. I think about death almost constantly.

I am also thinking constantly about life, both life now and life in the world to come. How can we live this life faithfully, and how may we help one another prepare for eternal life? In answer to these questions, there are two programs I'll be hosting this winter.

First, I will be hosting a Funeral Planning Workshop on **Sunday, February 4** following worship. This workshop will be an opportunity to consider what you would like your funeral service to look like. Do you want your service to be in the church or in the funeral home? Do you want hymns, and which ones? What Scriptures are important to you? We won't discuss what is covered by funeral homes (i.e. burial, flower arrangements, etc.) We will focus, instead, on the funeral service itself. This is because I often meet with families following the passing of a loved one and learn the loved ones have no idea what the deceased would like for their service, or they clearly choose what their loved one would not want. This is your opportunity to provide your church with your desires for a funeral service that reflects your faith.

(Cont. on page 2)

A Message from Pastor Laura (continued from page 1)

Second, our **Wednesday, January 31** Book Club meeting via Zoom will discuss hospice nurse Hadley Vlahos's book, *The In-Between: Unforgettable Encounters During Life's Final Moments*. This discussion will free us to talk about the mysterious side of death, our own experiences, and what we believe a 'good death' looks like. This will be a vulnerable conversation, as well as a profound one.



No one likes death, and I'm wary of anyone who says they do like it! But, with the exception of Enoch and Elijah, no one's escaped death yet. Even our Savior, Jesus Christ, has walked through death. His death gives us hope, however. For in the death of Jesus we know that death is never the final word. We all have the hope of life here and life in the world to come. Thanks be to God!

In Christ's Love,
Pastor Laura

Congregational Meeting & Officer Training By Shelby Gracey

The Session of Sunset Hills United Presbyterian Church has called for the annual congregational meeting to be held in the sanctuary after the worship service on Sunday, January 21, 2024.

- To hear and receive the reports of the commissions and organizations of the churches.
- To hear the report from the Nominating Committee and to elect Elders and Deacons.
- To elect members to the standing Nominating Committee.
- To receive the budget as information.
- To approve the Pastor's Terms of Call.
- To hear and approve the report of the Corporation.
- To elect minute readers for the congregation/corporation meeting.



Officer Training Saturday, January 20th

Pastor Laura will hold Officer training on Saturday, January 20th from 9 am – 5 pm at the church. Lunch will be provided. All attendees are encouraged to bring a snack to share.

Music Notes

By Shelby Gracey

By the time you all read this, the Christmas season is drawing to a close. I want to extend my thanks to the Chancel Choir, the Campanile Bells, and GPM for all the special music that was offered throughout the Advent and Christmas season. We hope it helped to fill your hearts with the Christmas spirit as we listened to the singing, ringing, and instrumentalists. A big thank you also goes to all the families who helped with the lighting of our Advent Wreath during the season.



As we enter into the new year, I want to draw attention once again to all of our singers, ringers, and instrumentalists who faithfully lead the congregation in meaningful and heartfelt music each week. Your dedication and commitment is truly something to be thankful for, and I'm so grateful to each and every one of you – SHUP is richly blessed because of you! We look forward to the New Year of 2024, with lots of beautiful music ahead!

Blanket Making

From St. Margaret's Church

Merry Christmas blanket makers!

We made 145 blankets this year. They were donated to 6 shelters:

- St. Joseph's House of Hospitality - part of Catholic Charities, residential shelter for 60 homeless men
- Pleasant Valley Mens Shelter - part of Northside Common Ministries, accommodates the needs of 25 homeless men each night
- Women's Space East - serves homeless families with dependent children – founded by women who saw a need in 1976
- Light of Life Rescue Mission - transforming lives through the love of Christ by providing food, shelter and hope to homeless men, women and children
- Harbor Light Mission - part of Salvation Army - long-term residential treatment program for adult men with substance use disorders
- Chartiers Center - Scott Township, programs focus on the integration of physical health and mental health wellness to enhance the quality of life for people with behavioral or intellectual and developmental disabilities



Thank you so much to all who contributed their time and resources to enable us to get all these warm beautiful blankets out to these facilities. I am sure we can't even know how much they are appreciated by the recipients. These blankets feel like a warm hug!

Although this yearly event started 21 years ago with a small group at St Margaret Church, through the years it has become a community collaboration of like-minded people who join together to produce a mighty large quantity of blankets. We are joined by ladies from St John Lutheran, Sunset Hills United Presbyterian, Ladies of Charity from St Raphael Parish, and many other friends and neighbors.

God Bless you all and I wish for you all many blessings in 2024.

Lynne Gross

Notes from Christian Education

By Taylor Strang

As we step into January, it's as if we're handed a blank canvas, having us reflect and begin new. In our Bible studies, Sunday School, and children's church we connect the lessons learned into our everyday experiences. It's a chance to ask questions, explore doubts, and find personal meaning in what we learn. Reflection isn't just about learning facts or stories; it's about understanding and caring for others. It's a journey of starting fresh each day, applying what we know to make a positive impact and spread goodness. Here's to starting fresh, living out those lessons, and being the sunshine someone might need today. I am so excited to start the new year with you all!

Days for Girls Pittsburgh South PA

Team

When?

Starting January 10th!

Wednesdays

10-2 pm

Last Sunday of
the Month

11:30-2:30 pm

Donation List

- Polyester Thread
- 5/8" Grosgrain Ribbon
- Sewing Scissors
- Seam Rippers
- Sewing Lights
- Rotary Cutters
- Straight Pins
- 24 x 18 Cutting Mat

Where?

Sunset Hills United
Presbyterian Church

Wilson Hall

Enter through side door
of large parking lot

900 Country Club
Drive, Pittsburgh, PA,
15226



**Movies
with the
Minister**

Sunday, January 7th
The Boys in the Boat

Join Pastor Laura for an afternoon at the movies! We will also meet after the showing to discuss the movie. Showtime and gathering place will be announced during the Jan. 7th worship service.

Attendees are responsible for the purchase of their ticket and dinner.

Welcome New Member – Marie Noonan



Marie Noonan recently became a SHUP member, after having grown up in the neighborhood. She was introduced to SHUP as a child attending Vacation Bible School.

Her maternal grandfather was a Presbyterian pastor, and her father was Catholic, so she was a member of St. Winifred Catholic Church, but sometimes attended Presbyterian worship services with her grandparents. Carol Noonan, a Deacon here at SHUP, is her mother. Marie has two siblings, and she loves spending time with a special family member, her three-year-old niece who attends SHUP Nursery School.

Marie now lives in the North Hills and teaches first grade in North Allegheny School District. She says the commute to Sunset Hills is easy on Sunday mornings, but not always so at other times! Visits to Wyoming and her uncle who lives there create

wonderful memories – the scenery, visits to national parks, and hiking. A dream is to visit the Gilded Age Vanderbilt Mansion in Newport, RI.

In addition to attending our Sunday morning worship services, Marie has already participated in planning for Days for Girls and intends to join other volunteers when the work begins here. Thankfully, there are opportunities for those who sew and, like Marie, those who don't! She also volunteered for "Parents' Night Out" last month.

We're so happy you've joined us, Marie!

By Frank and Lee Cepits, and Ginny Bowman



Chili Cook – Off

Sunday, January 28th

After Worship

Findley Hall

Do you make the best Chili?
Wanna' Prove it?

- Bring your chili in a crock pot and drop it off in the kitchen to be plugged in before the worship service starts.
- Be sure to bring any extras that your chili might need (cheese, sour cream, chives, corn bread, etc.).

Prizes will be awarded by the Neighborhood Outreach Committee.

Thank You

To the Choir,
I can't remember seeing anything as wonderful as your faces singing Christmas carols for me that freezing cold night in December! You can't know how much it meant after not seeing you in person all this time. You were all so beautiful - male and female! I loved the music, but most of all, I loved each of you being here. You have made the season a joyous one for me.

Thank you,

Evelyn

To the Monday Bible Study Group,
Thank you so much for activating Zoom so I could go to the Christmas party with you. It was good to be with you again. I do appreciate it isn't easy to do and you went to so much trouble to include me in the gift exchange and food. I want you to know how blessed I felt by your thoughtfulness, and how blessed I have always felt to be a part of this group. All of your thoughtful notes truly touched my soul!

With much love,

Evelyn



Dear Friends at SHUP,
Thank you for the kind Christmas gift! It helped to lift some of the financial labor that inevitably comes with the holidays. Your thoughtfulness is greatly appreciated. May you be blessed with a joyful New Year as we continue in serving Christ together!

Love,

Pastor Laura

Many thanks to the congregation and nursery school who donated the personal items this Advent Season. We delivered five large boxes to Familylinks after the holidays, and they were grateful to receive them. They stressed that our donations would definitely help many people over the winter and wanted to thank everyone for their generosity during the holiday season!

Shelby

I wanted to send a big "thank you" to everyone at SHUP. I have worked here for over 5 years now and every day that I get to spend with you is pure joy. Not many people can honestly say "I love my job," but I have found myself saying that a lot recently.

I am so grateful to all of you for your patience with me, your help (big shout out to Dick and Dottie...in case you weren't aware, this place would literally fall apart without them), and of course your kindness and generosity.

Thank you for the Christmas bonus this year. I will definitely be putting it to good use.

I wish you all nothing but good things in 2024, and am looking forward to another year of loving my job!

Karin

Mission at the Border

A World on the Move

The number of people seeking asylum in the US has been increasing steadily through the late summer and fall. The Border Patrol is struggling to process all the cases. People crossing the border to ask for asylum in the western part of Arizona are regularly bused to other Border Patrol stations for their paperwork.

The Douglas Border Patrol Station gets a lot of overflow from further west. After processing, people are dropped off nearly every day at the transit shelter in Douglas. This shelter is housed in the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church. Usually they stay for a few hours, get a meal or two, get some rest, get an orientation, and then board a bus for Casa Alitas, the big shelter in Tucson. There, they are helped to obtain plane or bus tickets to the place where their sponsor lives and are guided on their way.

Various groups in the community take turns staffing the shelter each week. Last Friday I was working at the Douglas shelter with volunteers from Frontera de Cristo. In the morning, six men came in. In the mid-afternoon another 34 people came in. In less than an hour we gave them an orientation, took down their information, fed them a meal, and said goodbye as they got on the bus for Tucson.

They were from Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Peru, the Dominican Republic, and Nepal. Sometimes we welcome guests who speak languages other than Spanish or English. People are crossing the border from all over the world. People are leaving countries in Central Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East. Their lives are threatened and they are seeking refuge in the country that symbolizes for them the hope of a better life.

The world is on the move. War, climate change, poverty, oppression of LGBTQ folks, political repression, economic exploitation, gang violence, and other causes are driving migration.

More walls and stricter laws will not solve the problem, nor will they stop people from migrating. People will do what they need to do to care for their families and find safety.

One rough estimate I heard lately was that about 4% of people who are admitted to the US after a Credible Fear hearing will be granted asylum at their eventual court date (which may be several years away). 16% will be deported. The other 80% will slip away and live in the shadows. There, they will be vulnerable to exploitation, afraid to seek protection from authorities, and trying to survive.

Our priority as a country should be working with other countries to promote safety, stability, peace, and economic opportunity so that people don't have to leave their homes. The migrants I've heard from say they would rather stay at home. But when someone kills your sister or your husband and tells you you're next, and you know the police are corrupt and if you reported it, you'd be dead for sure – what do you do?

They come to our border. They're looking for help in the only place they know to turn.

Douglas, a town of 15,000, has responded in a remarkable way. They have welcomed dozens of people a day in the transit shelter and provided them a warm welcome, a safe place to rest, and something to eat on their way to try to build a new life. This little town in the southeast corner of Arizona does its part to show some kindness to a world on the move. And they do that despite being a town with a high poverty rate, where all the schools qualify for federal assistance. Douglas has set an example for the rest of the country with their hospitality and generosity.



January Information

Adult Sunday School

9:00 am - Library

The class will continue to meet in the Library on Sunday mornings.

Sunday Worship

10:15 am

If you are not able to join us in person, a video of the service will be posted to our YouTube channel on the Monday after the service: [Sunset Hills Church - YouTube](#). You can get a copy of the bulletin by clicking on the link on the homepage of our website www.shupchurch.org.

Fellowship Hour

First Sunday of the Month

We will continue to hold fellowship after the worship service on the first Sunday of every month. If you would like to host one Sunday, please sign up on the sheet outside of Findley Hall.

Findley Hall Bible Study

Monday's – 1:00 pm

The Findley Hall Bible study will begin meeting again on January 8th.

If you would like to learn more about this study, please contact Jody Colby at jody.colby@verizon.net.

Wilson Hall Bible Study

Tuesday's – 1:00 pm

The class will be studying the Epistles, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. They will begin meeting again in 2024 on January 9th. If you are interested in learning more, please contact Carole McCullough at (412)343-5758.

Yoga - Evening

Wednesday's – 5:30 pm - Crystal Hall

Instructors from BreaheIn2It Yoga will hold their first class in 2024 on Tuesday, January 9th at 5:30 pm in Crystal Hall.

To sign up or learn more, please visit: [Online Stress Management & Anxiety Relief Programs \(breathein2it.com\)](#).

Campanile Bells Rehearsal

Tuesday's - 6:30 pm

Bells will have practice in the sanctuary.

Peanuts Square Dancing Club

Tuesday's - 7:00 pm

The Peanuts Square Dancing club will meet in Crystal Hall. Everyone is welcome, no partner or previous experience is needed. There is a cost of \$5/class.

Chancel Choir Practice

Tuesday's - 7:30 pm

Chancel choir will have practice in the choir room.

Tai Chi

Wednesday's – 6:30 pm

Gurney Bolster, certified Tai Chi instructor, will begin a new 8-week session on January 10th.

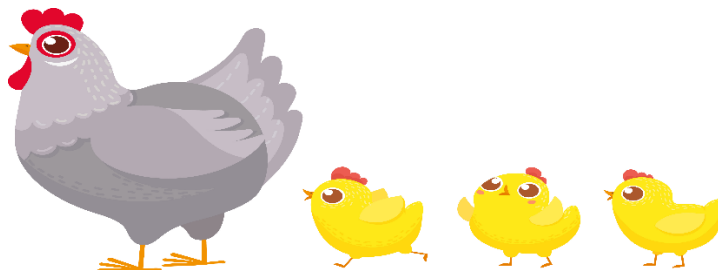
If you are interested in learning more about these classes, please contact Gurney at: gurneybolster@gmail.com.

Yoga - Evening

Thursday's – 7:00 pm - Crystal Hall

Instructors from BreaheIn2It Yoga will hold their first class in 2024 on Thursday, January 11th at 7:00 pm in Crystal Hall.

To sign up or learn more, please visit: [Online Stress Management & Anxiety Relief Programs \(breathein2it.com\)](#).

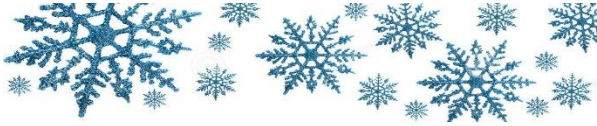


Rev. Dr. Strauss's Dissertation

Pastor Laura Dissertation entitled "As a Hen Gathers Her Chicks," will be made available in early 2024 to the congregation. She will be using her dissertation for a sermon series of the same name through the season of Lent, February 18 – March 17, 2024.

January Birthdays

- | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| 4 Rosemary Romig | 24 Lori Matson |
| 11 Keith Yanda | 27 Shelby Gracey |
| 14 Beth Romig | 31 William Stimmel |
| 20 Jackie Elborne | Amanda Zeglin |



Prayer List

Dee Borman



Prayer Circle

We ask that every week you take a moment and add these people to your daily prayers.

<u>Week of:</u>	<u>Praying for:</u>
Jan 7 th	Katie Jordan David Kastner
Jan 14 th	The Kennedy family; Nathaniel, Jenn, Drew & Ben John & Bev Knasko
Jan 21 st	Evelyn Lape Linda MacDonald
Jan 28 th	Meg MacDougall Lori Matson & Sean

Office Closed

Jan. 1st

The Church office will be closed for New Year's Day.

Nursery School Closed

Jan 1 & Jan. 2nd

The Sunset Hills Nursery School will resume classes on January 3rd.

SHIM Food Donations

January 2024

This month, we will be collecting **Tuna.**

Sunset Hills Book Club

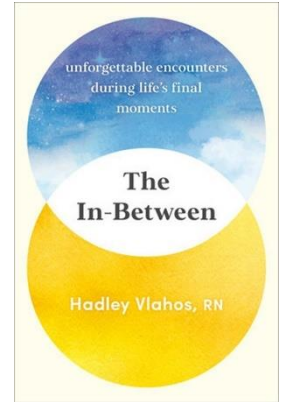
January Book of the Month

The In Between

By Hadley Vlahos

Jan. 31st – 7:30 pm

*Vlahos was raised in a strict religious household, but began questioning her beliefs in high school after the sudden death of a friend. When she got pregnant at nineteen, she was shunned by her community and enrolled herself in nursing school to be able to support herself and her baby. But nursing soon became more than a job: when she focused on palliative care and hospice work, it became a calling. In *The In-Between*, Vlahos recounts the most impactful experiences she's had with the people she's worked with...while also sharing her own fascinating journey. Written with profound insight, humility, and respect, *The In-Between* is a heartrending memoir that shows how caring for others can transform a life while also offering wisdom and comfort for those dealing with loss and providing inspiration for how to live now. (Amazon Book Description)*

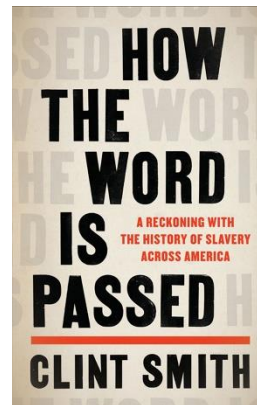


February 2024

How the Word is Passed

by Clint Smith

Meeting on **February 28th**



March 2024

The Magnolia Palace

by Fiona Davis

Meeting on **March 27th**

