

January 2026 Newsletter

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church of South Hills



Volume 3 Issue 1

From The Pastor's Desk

I was Blind but now I see

Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life." (John 8:12 NLT)

I have gone to the same dentist for 43 years. In that time, the same picture hangs in the waiting room. It is one of those pictures of many designs and colors that contain the hidden image of fighter jets. Try as I may, I have never seen them. Others have pointed them out to me, but I am blind to them. My problem is that I am blind – color blind. My eyes cannot discern the colors that would make it possible for me to spot those jets.

Color blindness is one thing but something far worse and dangerous is spiritual blindness that comes from being enslaved to sin.

How is it that one becomes enslaved? Consider the people Jesus is speaking to in John 8. When Jesus says they will be free, their reaction is "We are Abraham's offspring and have never been slaves to anyone." (John 8:33) How blind they are! Their history as a nation was one on captivity to one nation after another. However, this is the way sin works. It enslaves us first by blinding us to who we are. Then sin makes certain things look more desirable than Jesus Himself. Imagine that! How could this be? That is the essence of sin – it dominates us so deeply that we desire and see something above Jesus and seek it above Him. All of this is rooted in the lies, the father of lies, Satan. **"Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who do not believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News."** (II Cor. 4:4 NLT) When this happens, we become blind to the captivity of our own lives.

Stop here for a moment and ask yourself, where has sin blinded me in the past?

The second way that sin enslaves is through damnation. Unless someone intervenes, we live our life beneath a sentence of condemnation. Our lives are lived echoing Paul's words **"For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing - Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"** (Romans 7:19 & 24)

Jesus stands before us this day and says, "you will know the truth and the truth shall make you free." What is this truth? Jesus! He is the one who frees us from the domination and damnation of our sin. The Word tells us **"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us"** Galatians 3:13 The truth is also that His Father is your Father. Incredible isn't it? As we enter a new year, may our eyes be opened to this truth, where true freedom rests. Tim Keller offers this beautiful thought; "We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope."

When our eyes are opened to what He has done for us and what He suffered in our place, then we are freed from our desires for the things of this world in place of Jesus. Our eyes are open to see Him as our greatest treasure in the truth, when He says; **"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life."** (John 8:12)

In the year ahead, may the eyes of your heart be open to the truth in Jesus, that frees us from regret and shame from the past and fear of what lies ahead.

-Pastor Barry

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President's Corner

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

With the beginning of a new calendar year, comes reflection on purpose and process and progress. If we go back and check ourselves on purpose, we find our mission statement: The mission of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church is to know and praise Christ, to grow in Christ and to share Christ with others. This is printed on the front page of our Church Service bulletin each week and is a simple statement that reminds us and tells others what Good Shepherd is all about.

We can assess the process developed for fulfilling our Mission statement through the priorities that we developed in our strategic planning process just over a year ago: 1) To enhance our Family Life and Youth Ministry 2) To improve our technology and IT infrastructure 3) To offer blended services 4) To revive and utilize Small Group Ministry 5) To leverage Elder and layperson caregiving.

How have we progressed in each area of focus:

1) Our work in Family Life and Youth could not be better thanks to the incredible efforts of the Watkins Family: John & Stephanie, Jane and Daniel. When the Watkins Family agreed to take on this responsibility, it was dead; virtually nothing was being done consistently to add energy and activity to Family Life and Youth. Since taking the leadership role, almost \$30K was raised to send a contingent of Good Shepherd Youth, Nepalese Youth and Chaperones to the LCMS National Youth Gathering in New Orleans last summer. This alone is an incredible accomplishment and gift to each person who attended and to their Families. Hannah Thurston led the entourage to New Orleans and can give you very specific feedback about the trip. In addition, the Watkins have held continuous events; fireplace gatherings, bingo night, ice cream social, Steeler tailgate, etc. which have brought people together. Everyone is invited to attend these events and are highly encouraged to do so. The objective is to provide a fellowship opportunity for people in our congregation and non-members who are brought by friends, to strengthen relationships and grow in community while reaching in and reaching out and sharing the love of God. I cannot thank John & Stephanie and their two resilient children, Jane and Daniel, for their loving service to Good Shepherd. I look forward to their plans and activities in 2026.

2) Our IT and technology area is a continual work-in-process. Scott Thurston has taken responsibility for this area and has formed an IT committee. A lot of work has been done but a lot continually needs done. There are legacy systems and equipment that made sense when installed, that are now outdated. We have upgraded computers. We have changed the software we use for our weekly church services but we are still learning, still adjusting; we have opportunities for improvement. We have upgraded microphones and installed tv monitors. A lot of work has been done and I thank people like Scott, Jim Marlowe, Mike Ressler, Grace and others. This journey will never end.

3) When we identified the term blended service as a strategic objective, this was just after Jeremy left our Church to go to Pleasant Hills Presbyterian. The meaning of blended service was basically to find a replacement for Jeremy. After a few attempts, we have found an excellent musician and follower of Jesus in Micah Nagel. Micah was identified by Carole Schade, who had heard him sing at an event. Micah is the son of a Pastor and plays at another Church two times a month. We asked him if he would be willing to play at Good Shepherd the other two Sundays per month and he agreed. Since then he has included the beautiful voice of Carol Kagemann, Kim Ressler and others. There are technology and licensing issues here which we are attentive to and must manage around. Grace and Pastor Barry are careful in the selection of what songs are used and whether video is available that can be used without causing a breach. This area will continue to evolve.

4) Unless you participated, you may not be aware that there have been a few small group ministry sessions available over the last year. Ray Vogel organized and led a Small Group session focused on The Chosen, which was recommended by Mark & Laurie Coleman. Grace led a small group ministry opportunity for young mothers. Pastor Barry conducted some focused small group ministry sessions around the Preschool Staff. This is an area that is available to expand if individuals are willing to step up and lead. That would be welcomed.

President's Corner Continued

5) Caregiving is something that is done very well at Good Shepherd. The Elders: Ray Vogel (Chair), Mark Coleman, Dom Molinari, Mike Ressler do so much! Much of what they do may not be visible to the Congregation. Likewise, laypeople like: Ruth Johnson, Carole Shade, Bud Hoellein, Louise Kratz, Kim Ressler, and the list goes on, are very active in their support of shut-ins, the elderly and those in need. A prime example is the beautiful care that Bud provided to Tillie Koerth for decades. When Tillie could no longer live independently and was moving to a new assisted-care facility, Bud made sure, at the encouragement of Pastor Barry, Pastor Adam and Ray Vogel that she attend a church service to say goodbye to the members of the church she grew up in, and was a member of, her entire life. Ray and the Elders helped with cleaning out her apartment, dispositioning her furniture and other belongings, etc. When Tillie moved into a Concordia facility in Wexford, Bud and Pastor Barry visited her several times prior to her going home to be with the Lord. To me, this is a love story...a story of the love a congregation has for one of its Sisters in Christ. This is one example of many. I believe this area of Ministry in Good Shepherd is strong and people like Ruth Johnson will be quietly working with Ray V, Pastor Barry, myself and others to make sure we support those in need.

So how do we proceed in 2026? I suggest we pray, keep doing what we do well, challenge ourselves to find the energy and resources to do more where we see a need, be gracious and positive and loving in our approach to others, and have faith that the Lord will lead us and provide. We are stewards of many things, may we manage them effectively and generously in a manner that will glorify and honor our Lord.

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus". Philippians 4:6-7

I have called a Congregation Meeting for Sunday, Jan 29, 2026 after our Church Service. I pray you can attend and look forward to your participation!

Your Brother in Christ, Ray

January 2026

Sunday morning worship continues in-person and it is also being live streamed.

[Click here](#) Sundays to join us in worship via our YouTube Channel.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1 GSLC Office Closed	2 GSLC Office Closed	3
4 10:15a Sunday Worship 12:30p BPFC 3p DEN	5 Preschool Resumes 3pm BCAP 5:15p DEN 7pm Boy Scouts	6 3pm BCAP 6pm Scrapbooki ng	7 3pm BCAP 5:15 DEN	8 3pm BCAP 5pm Soccer Shots 5:45p DEN	9 GSLC Office Closed 3p BCAP	10 9am Soccer Shots
11 9:15a Adult Bible Study 10:15a Sunday Worship w/ Communion 12:30p BPFC 3p DEN	12 3pm BCAP 5:15p DEN 7pm Boy Scouts	13 3pm BCAP	14 3p BCAP 5:15p DEN	15 3p BCAP 5p Soccer Shots 5:45p DEN	16 GSLC Office Closed 3p BCAP	17 9am Soccer Shots
18 9:15a Adult Bible Study 10:15a Sunday Worship 12:30p BPFC 3p DEN	19 No Preschool 5:15p DEN 7pm Boy Scouts	20 3pm BCAP 6pm Scrapbooki ng	21 3p BCAP 5:15p DEN	22 3p BCAP 5p Soccer Shots 5:45p DEN	23 GSLC Office Closed 3p BCAP 4:00p DEN Pinewood Derby	24 DEN Pinewood Derby
25 9:15a Adult Bible Study 10:15a Sunday Worship 12:30p BPFC 3p DEN	26 3pm BCAP 5:15p DEN 7pm Boy Scouts	27 3pm BCAP	28 3p BCAP 5:15p DEN	29 3p BCAP 5p Soccer Shots 5:45p DEN	30 GSLC Office Closed 3p BCAP	31 9am Soccer Shots

BPFC – Pgh Nepali Church
 BCAP – Bhutanese Community Association
 of Pittsburgh
 DEN – Cub Scouts
 PPS – Pittsburgh Performance Society
 Events in green are Good Shepherd Events
 Events in purple are Preschool Events

January Birthdays & Anniversaries

Birthdays

1/3 – Stella Bialecki
1/7 – Dave Barone
1/8 – Starlett Sawchak
1/11 – Ron Gerstacker
1/14 – Makenna Glasser
1/15 – Art Malenky
1/16 – Karen Sawchak
1/17 – Sandy Kirkwood
1/17 – Gavin Scheller
1/19 – Nikki Yakemowicz
1/19 – Greg Zeman
1/20 – Zachary Zeman
1/21 – Kim Ressler
1/24 – Aiden Winters
1/30 – Ken Kirkwood



Anniversaries

1/7 – Mark & Laurie Coleman (20)



Good Shepherd Announcements

Church office hours: Monday – Thursday 8:30am – 12:30pm

If you have any pastoral care need, please feel free to reach out to Pastor Barry at: 724-996-2160

Call Committee Announcement

The committee continues their work, although the Advent and Christmas season has stalled it a bit. The last list of candidates we received from the District office consisted of three pastors, all of whom the committee interviewed. After speaking to them, we determined that one pastor was not a good fit for Good Shepherd, and one pastor confirmed his current call and asked us to remove him from further consideration. We do wish to speak to the third pastor on the list a second time, but he requested a pause until after the holiday season. Hopefully, we will be able to coordinate a time to speak again with him soon. In the meantime, we thank you for your continued prayers for the call process, for our congregation in this time of vacancy, and for the pastors on call lists and their congregations.

- Kim Ressler, Call Committee Chair

Preschool Announcements

Preschool Open House is Monday, January 12th, 2026 at 5:30pm.

Registration opens to current families on Monday January 12th, 2026 as well.

Registration for new families begins January 26, 2026



Family Life & Youth Committee Announcements

Thank you to everyone who donated to our Toys for Tots campaign! Because of your generosity, we collected nearly 90 toys and 160 books. With an average of 2–3 gifts per child, that means we're able to help bring smiles to between 80 and 125 children this season.

We are so grateful for your support and kindness.



Thank you to everyone who was able to enjoy donuts, coffee and hot chocolate on December 7.

Prayer Requests:

Rachel Schaar, Cathy Cerminara, Karen Miller, Marian Maskow, Rev. Daniel Strussenberg, Don Steward, Cathy Sayre, Sarah Brooks, Peter Way, Michael Ayres, Mrs. Deemer, Carol DeAngelis, Larry Winker, Mike Brennan, Erika Similo, Jan Kleiser, Lisa Brady, Don Matthews, Pastor Tim, Tiffany, Mary Jane Forrest, Hope Leydig, Dennis Lee, Sam Langol, Melissa Medved, Anne Malone, Gary Cooper, Carolyn Uhlyar, Norma Mikoleit, Joan Uhrinak, Arlene Stroebel, Bebe Bair, Iris and Steve Wutzke, Alice Meyer, Nancy Wauthier, John Schmidt, Zack, Michele Mulick, Mourice Williams, Dr. Bruce Bickel, Jay, Jake Herring, Carol Archer, Sean Sleeman, Eric Powell, Ron Gerstacker, Phyllis Hackbart, Jared Lubawski, Kaiden, Andie Keurulainen



“Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits – who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases” -Psalm 103:2-3

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(or, go to YouTube and search @goodshepherdlutheranchurch3950)



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