

Shepherd Wellness Community
2025 Report for the Preconvention Journal of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh

In 1987 Fr. Lynn C. Edwards† (then serving Church of the Good Shepherd, Hazelwood), Social Worker Cyndee Klemanski, and Dr. Bill Brandon, met with a group of men dying of AIDS, who needed a safe and welcoming community and gathering place for support and care. Shepherd Wellness Community (SWC) held its first dinner that October. In the beginning, SWC's mission was helping people die with dignity. Today, SWC remains the only HIV/AIDS community in Western Pennsylvania. Our mission is helping people living with HIV/AIDS improve their wellness. SWC is a ministry of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh of The Episcopal Church.

Rev. Deacon Linda Tardy Wilson serves on our board of directors as a representative of the Episcopal Diocese, appointed by Bishop Solak. Deacon LindaT is also Secretary of the Board.

Fr. Chuck Esposito (St. Stephen, Wilksburg) serves as our SWC Spiritual Advisor, available for pastoral care and support for our members, staff and board. Fr. Chuck also presents programs on spirituality and health, and facilitates a periodic open discussion on spiritual questions and concerns, as well as sharing leadership in our annual Holiday Candlelight Service in December, when we also remember those in the SWC community who have died.

On August 1, 2025 Bishop Ketlan and Scott attended our Friday dinner for our **annual Bishop's Visitation**.

In August, SWC held our Annual Meeting with reports and elections to the Board of Directors. In the last fiscal year we welcomed 56 new members, and attendance at our dinners increased - we had a **31% increase in the number of meals served, totaling just over 7,400 meals** provided. Many of our members are food insecure, and with increasing costs, along with the stressful changes in our country, people living with HIV are seeking community and much needed support in these challenging times.

SWC continues to be the **grateful recipient of the SJO Garden Grants**. We have a series of raised beds in which we grow vegetables and herbs, which our Chef Jim Edmonds-Harpster uses in our wellness dinners during harvest season. This year's crop has been plentiful, and our members are thrilled to have their meals enriched by the home-grown produce.

Our ministry to the HIV positive community has also been supported by generous grants from the **Women of Calvary**.

We welcome and encourage **Friday Dinner Sponsorships** (\$375 swconline.org) where groups or individuals can provide additional support, and even recruit volunteers to help with dinner on their sponsorship night. St. Paul's, Mt. Lebanon has been a faithful and frequent dinner sponsor over this last year, with a variety of members and friends of the congregation volunteering. This is an excellent mission/social outreach project for parishes, and supports us as a ministry of the Diocese.

On October 9, 2025, Shepherd Wellness Community held our second annual fundraiser since the pandemic: **SWC Red Ribbon Benefit: An Evening of Community and Culture**. The evening at Rodef Shalom Congregation in Shadyside was a hit, with fantastic food (catered by SWC's Chef Jim and staff) and a show, hosted by Pittsburgh's Funny Girl Dixie Surewood, featuring Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, Concert pianist Jack Kurutz, Pittsburgh Festival Opera's Marianne Cornetti, Singer Richard Teaster, Dance Artist Jesse Factor (and ensemble) and Harpist Marissa Knaub Avon. During the Benefit we

honored 2 couples: Phil Herrington and Matt Ometz† for their contributions to SWC, and Kathi Boyle and Betty Hill for their service to the larger HIV+ community.

The proceeds from the Benefit are especially needed now; in September we learned that our **state funding for providing HIV services was cut 25%, leaving us with a funding loss of over \$70,000 dollars.**

Shepherd Wellness Community, jointly with Pittsburgh Equality Center, holds a **monthly fundraiser: OUTrageous Bingo**, held at Rodef Shalom September-May (outrageousbingogh.org). We are the original “drag” bingo in Pittsburgh, and your attendance supports our mission. OUTrageous Bingo is also a great venue for your birthday or any occasion celebration.

During summer 2025 our kitchen received a major renovation, which has increased menu capacity and variety with upgraded appliances, increased space for our kitchen staff and volunteers, and is decreasing our reliance on plastics and styrofoam with the addition of a commercial dishwasher. This will also enhance our dining experience as we can now use permanent plates, glasses, and silverware. With grants and gifts, along with our 2024 Red Ribbon Benefit fundraiser, **this renovation has been totally paid for.** Our thanks to all who contributed to this significant and needed improvement for our wellness dinners. And thanks go to our nonprofit partner, Community Kitchen Pittsburgh, for catering our dinners during the renovation, so we could continue to provide meals for our members.

On Monday, December 1, 2025, SWC will again host the World AIDS Day (December 1) Annual Observance/Service by the Pitt Men’s Study. All are welcome to come to this event, which begins at 5:30 pm. A reception, catered by our own Chef Jim, follows the observance.

In closing, we are grateful for the support of our work provided by the Episcopal Diocese, Bishop Solak, individual parishes, the Episcopal Church Women and the Women of Calvary, which enables us to continue our ministry.

Our 2024-25 HIV/AIDS wellness programs include:

- Wellness Dinners (Monday, Wednesday, Friday) to improve nutrition, reduce isolation, and provide social support.
- Peer Counseling phone calls to connect members with HIV/AIDS services and offer a lifeline of help, support and hope.
- Support Groups which boost mental and physical health. Groups guide members through the challenges of living with HIV/AIDS and help participants to deal with anxiety, depression and other relevant issues.
- Health Education Programs to provide information about HIV/AIDS treatment, HIV medications and the latest medical advances.
- Complementary Therapy Classes to teach members how to improve health and wellness and strengthen their immune systems.
- Treatment Adherence and Risk Reduction Programs to advise members on how to effectively maintain their HIV medical regimen and ways to decrease the risk of HIV transmission and reinfection.
- Spiritual Life Programs presented in an interfaith format which offer insight, encouragement, inspiration, direction and guidance.
- Social and Recreational Outings to combat isolation and loneliness and provide supportive community and respite for families.
- Chair massage to reduce stress and enhance circulation.

- Wellness Classes to help improve quality of life by addressing the Six Dimensions of Wellness (social, occupational, spiritual, physical, intellectual and emotional).
- Transportation Assistance, in the form of bus tickets, mileage reimbursement, or Access rides, which helps our members attend programs and access services.

The board of directors, staff and members of Shepherd Wellness Community express our gratitude to the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh for 38 years of ministry to people living with HIV/AIDS.

With thanks for our partnership in the Gospel,

Richard W. Krug

Executive Director, Shepherd Wellness Community