

## Shepherd Wellness Community 2024 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.

William Stevens (Calvary, East Liberty) continues to serve on our board of directors as a representative of the Episcopal Diocese, appointed by Bishop Solak.

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 May 10, 2024 Bishop Ketlan and Scott attended our Friday dinner for our annual Bishop's Visitation. This was also the day we recognized mothers in anticipation of Mother's Day.

In August, SWC held our Annual Meeting with reports and elections to the Board of Directors. We are welcoming new members, and attendance at our dinners and programs has increased 21% over the last year as 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 very 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.

On October 10, 2024, Shepherd Wellness Community held our first major fundraiser since the pandemic: **SWC Red Ribbon Benefit: A Fashion Experience and AIDS Retrospective**. The evening at the Carnegie Library and Music Hall in Carnegie, PA was a hit, with fantastic food (catered by SWC's Chef Jim and staff), a stellar fashion show organized by our Coordinator of Programs and Volunteers Daequan Andino featuring local designers (including Daequan!) and local models, and a moving yet hopeful AIDS retrospective honoring the past, celebrating the present, and embracing the future. During the Benefit we honored retired City Councilperson Bruce Kraus and HIV educator, leader, and advocate Dr. Linda Rose Frank for their contributions to SWC, those living with HIV, and the larger community. We also honored the memory of Beverly Pollock, former board member and dynamic leader for decades at SWC, who died last year age 99.

The proceeds from the Benefit, almost \$30,000, supports our **summer 2025 kitchen renovation**, which will increase menu capacity and variety with upgraded appliances, increase space for our kitchen staff

and volunteers, and significantly decrease our reliance on plastics and styrofoam by installing a commercial dishwasher. This will also enhance our dining experience by using permanent plates, glasses, and silverware.

Along with grants and gifts, we now **have raised 50% of what we need** for the kitchen renovation. **If you would like to support this needed project, go to <https://swconline.org/donate-online-now> and note kitchen renovation in the notes.** Thank you for your support!

In Sunday, December 1, 2024, 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 2023-24 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 thirty-seven 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