



# Shepherd's Staff



## DIG DEEPER

Men's Retreat

February 27 - March 1

Camp Wartburg, Waterloo, IL



The Monthly Newsletter of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

January 2026

### Dig Deeper Men's Retreat

February 27- March 1, 2026

Camp Waterloo, IL

\$165

Good Shepherd has a long history of Men's Retreats because we value real relationships. One of the best gifts God gives us through the Church is each other; live-giving community. Yet Sunday mornings can feel busy.

Maybe you meet a new person but barely scratch the surface of who they really are.

Maybe you made a connection and want to know more about that person's story.

Maybe quick conversations in the Narthex are nice, but are they enough to develop the kind of Christian brotherhood we see in the Scriptures?

Retreats are one of those places that go beyond the handshake and hello and get to the heart of it. Who is God calling me to be? What purpose and passion is God stirring in me in this season?

This is precisely why our Good Shepherd Men's Retreat is called **Dig Deeper**.

This is more than a weekend away. It is a moment to step outside your normal and experience God's extraordinary. **Dig Deeper** is a weekend where you can explore

your faith, your questions. It is a place to share your struggles and your joys. You will be challenged and encouraged to dig deeper into God's word and your walk with Jesus. You will form deeper relationships with other Christian men. It is our prayer that you will also discover deeper purpose for your life.

We are praying for you. We are excited for you. Don't wait. **Sign up today.**

Dig Deeper Men's Retreat



**Josh Brecht**

**Lead Pastor**

### **Can the Church Talk about Justice in Today's World? (And Grow in Love & Unity at the Same Time?)**

There are things happening in our world that are tense, complicated, very politically charged. Sometimes we will have to talk about them. How do we, as a church, talk about these issues without causing *more* division? What if there was a better way? What if we could build *more unity* by talking about it?

Many of us are struggling. Not only do these issues directly impact people in our lives, but also the ministry that we do inside and outside of Good Shepherd.

**1 Corinthians 12:26** says, "*If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.*" Many of our brothers and sisters in Christ are suffering deeply right now, and God calls us to not ignore the suffering of our neighbor (**Luke 10:29-36**).

When we address these complex issues, I want to make a promise to you. I promise to always, to the best of my ability, approach issues in a nonpartisan way. I promise to do so not from my personal politics or opinions, but **from a Jesus-centered perspective.**

What does the Bible show us about this?

What does Jesus teach us?

What is God calling us to do in this moment?

- How do we as Christians understand this complex topic or situation?

I will not always do this perfectly, but I ask you to believe this is my intention. In the Small Catechism, Martin Luther teaches of the 8<sup>th</sup> commandment (“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor”), that for our neighbors we are to, “**... speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light.**” Can we promise to do this with one another?

In our congregation are Republicans, Democrats, and everything in between. I love and respect each of you. There are people on our staff that are Republicans, Democrats and everything in between. I love and respect each person on our staff. Most of us have family members and friends that we deeply love that hold different political or ideological perspectives.

**I believe that as Christians we can and should be able to find common ground, especially on topics that are central to our faith.**

I am committed to listening, to being changed, and to seeking a broader understanding. I am also deeply committed to truth. Today, truth and facts are difficult to discern, or often simply ignored. There is an *overwhelming* amount of misinformation (some intentional, some not intentional) from leaders, media outlets, and the internet. My dream is to work together, to move beyond the inflammatory rhetoric and echo chambers, and to find our way back to a common reality. I believe the local church is the best place to do this precisely because of our shared faith in Jesus Christ.

When we talk about sensitive issues of justice, my goal is never to create a partisan, homogenous congregation. My goal is never to align with a singular ideology of the world. Frankly, that's what many churches have been trying to do for a while and how has that been going for us? Not well. (I confess that, I too, have gotten caught up in this in the past.) If we go down that road, we end up drawing lines, picking sides, and rejecting the beautiful complexity of the body of Christ God has given.

I believe that we can build more unity in a world that says divide. We can grow more hope in a world that says despair. **I believe that the local church is the most powerful agent of healing for our broken society today.** We agree on much more than we realize.

In this moment, I believe God is calling to be agents of healing and reconciliation. God is inviting us to rediscover a shared reality that allows us to unify in our ministry as we serve the least of these and create a more just and beautiful world for all people.

## What comes next?

- 1. Draw Near to Jesus** through prayer and scripture, inviting him to transform our hearts and minds
- 2. Promise** to approach each other with curiosity, humility, and faithfulness, choosing the most generous interpretation of intentions
- 3. Develop Common Language**, create memorable and repeatable sayings, teachings and values that form a Jesus-Centered culture to remind us of who we are and our common purpose
- 4. Ministry of Reconciliation & Depolarization** – move from the rhetoric of worldly categories to a shared reality to better understand each other, complex issues, and our shared values in Christ.
- 5. Seek God's Justice.** Jesus calls us to love our neighbors and even our enemies. What does our ministry of justice and service mean in a world where words like "justice" and "serving the poor" have become politicized? Learn how to address injustice without stepping into divisive partisan traps.

I hope and pray that you will join in with this movement God is inviting us into. In the weeks and months ahead, we will be sharing more messages, sermon series', devotionals, and more to walk this road together. Come Holy Spirit.

### Guiding Bible Verse:

*"From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us." - 2 Corinthians 5:16-19*

### Recommended resources to begin our journey:

Mel Robbins Podcast - We are not as divided as we think.

Good Faith Podcast - Can the local church heal political division?



## LifeWise StL Holiday Market Reflection & Thanks

### 2025 Holiday Market Re-Cap

For more than fifty years, the LifeWise StL Holiday Market has helped spread holiday joy to the families they serve. This event is open to those who have participated in their programming throughout the year. Families shop for NEW and carefully curated age-appropriate toys, clothing, and house-hold items offered at much reduced pricing made possible through the generosity of donations from the community. This year's event ran from December 5th – 12th (including set-up and take-down) at the 12th and Park Recreation Center. Just over 160 families participated, impacting as many as 600 people. Here is a *Thank You* from some of the participants:

Thank You!

With LifeWise StL as our local service partner, Good Shepherd's support included the donation of 320 items collected through our "*Christmas in September*" gift drive, along with \$7,500 in LifeWise-designated funds used for purchasing additional items. Also, of the 262 volunteers who helped this year, there were at least 30 from Good Shepherd who worked together as groups across three different days, primarily with sorting, pricing, and organizing gift items beforehand. Plus, at least those volunteering on Sunday saw gifts purchased with our donated dollars being delivered from shopping done by LifeWise StL that day!



Our volunteers learned first-hand from LifeWise StL staff how much Good Shepherd's support is appreciated and the positive impact it has on those they serve. The 2 ½ - 3

hours each of our groups spent working together was a wonderful experience, nicely expressed by comments shared below from Cindy Nichols, one of our volunteers.

*"Walking into the Community Center really put me into the holiday mood! Seeing all of the lights and Christmas decorations set up for the families who would be visiting soon really touched my heart. It was so much fun to spend time setting up with my fellow Good Shepherd friends. I was amazed and proud at the sheer amount of gifts that were donated by Good Shepherd and others in the area. Before I knew it, our 3 hour shift was up! So happy to have been a part of this life-affirming ministry."*



If you weren't able to help with the 2025 Holiday Market, consider doing so in 2026! Mark your calendar now for sign-up opportunities that begin in October! LifeWise StL also offers multiple other service opportunities throughout the year – both for individuals and groups. If interested, visit [LifeWise Stl - Volunteer](#) for information on what's available and how to sign-up.



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