



Newsletter March 2026

219 Hummel Street, Harrisburg, PA 17104
(717) 234-0415

The Gather the Guitars team extends our heartfelt thanks to everyone in the community who came out to support Gather the Spirit at this year's event on February 8, 2026, held at the Abbey Bar at Appalachian Brewing Company.

Because of your generosity and enthusiasm, the afternoon was filled with great music, strong fellowship, and meaningful impact. We were honored to enjoy performances by Megan Miller, Matt Jameson, Vince Rollins, and special guest Deanna Grahl Witzel, whose talent helped make the event truly memorable.

We are also grateful for the outstanding participation in our silent auction, which exceeded expectations and will directly support our ongoing mission to serve those in need.



Events like this are only possible because of a caring community willing to show up, give back, and stand with us. Thank you for being part of this journey and for helping us continue the work of Gather the Spirit.

A Note from Art Williams
Gather the Spirit for Justice (GTSFJ)
Board Vice President and Program Committee Chair

At Gather the Spirit, we are the grateful recipients of lots of generous donations. Some are monetary gifts. Some come in the form of food by the box-load, toiletries by the truckload, warm gloves by the bagful, well-stocked daypacks by the dozen, kid's toys and baby supplies by the carload. Some of us spend a bit of time each week driving around picking up donations from various churches, stores and restaurants who identify with our mission and are eager to help us out. But today I want to do a shout-out to an individual I don't even know.



There are a few boxes in a local church for folks to drop off donations specifically for Gather the Spirit. I swing by regularly and pick up whatever is there. And a few times now, among other donations, I have found a carefully packed small shopping bag. It isn't a donation that, like some, is going to strain my muscles or fill my car. But the contents were obviously chosen with love and care, and great thoughtfulness. I don't know the donor. But I do know that they put effort and time into choosing each item. This person is doing what they are able to do, and giving what they are able to give. And doing so with kindness in their heart to help a stranger and to help build community. My heart and thanks go out to everyone who, like this anonymous person, is doing what they are able to do each week to help our mission!

Gather the Spirit Statistics

Below are attendance numbers for our Saturday breakfasts since the beginning of this very cold 2026. The deep chill caused attendance to drop off a bit back in January. But it's funny how the warmer the weather gets the more folks want to venture out and enjoy some fellowship with their neighbors. Hmm! In fact, just this first Saturday of March we recorded our post-COVID all-time highest attendance in both guests and volunteers!

Date	1/3	1/10	1/17	1/24	1/31	2/7	2/14	2/21	2/28	3/7
Guests	134	157	125	115	156	137	179	196	250	314
Volunteers	35	45	42	41	41	39	35	46	55	59

And in addition to Saturdays, we have been averaging approximately 50 guests each Sunday afternoon!

Profile of a Partner

Our friends come to us in many ways. A family member of one of the Gather the Guitars musicians introduced us to Mike Weil, Executive Director of Daily Operations at the Veterans Coalition of Pennsylvania. Mike and the Coalition have gifted us with giant boxes of toilet tissue, baby wipes and other toiletries. We are so grateful not only for the toiletries, but for the encouragement. Below is the story of this inspiring partner.



A Warrior's Journey: From Combat to Community

In 1986, Michael Weil of Northampton, Pennsylvania, enlisted in the US Army, answering a call to serve something greater than himself. Assigned to the 2nd Armored Division, his service took him from Fort Hood to Germany and ultimately to Kuwait during Desert Storm, where he spent a year in combat witnessing the heavy toll war takes on soldiers and their spirits.

When Mike returned home in 1992, he built a successful civilian career as an ironworker and millwright supervisor while raising his two daughters as a single father. But beneath that success, he quietly struggled with PTSD, grief, and anger. Over time, the invisible wounds of war caught up with him. In 2018, after years of internal battles, Mike lost his home, his stability, and ultimately found himself homeless.

A turning point came when he entered care at Horsham Clinic, where he was connected to veterans' support resources. Soon he began volunteering with local churches, helping distribute food to homeless camps in Reading and Pottstown. During one outreach, he realized, "I was the man I was feeding." That moment transformed his path.

Mike became deeply involved with the Veterans Coalition of Pennsylvania, where he found belonging, brotherhood, and renewed purpose. In 2021, he joined the Oley Fire Company, fulfilling a childhood dream and gaining a supportive community that helped him rebuild his life. By 2022, Mike was managing a transitional veterans' home and turning unused space into supply hubs for food, clothing, and hygiene items. Partnerships with churches, nonprofits, and companies such as Kimberly-Clark and Amazon helped expand the effort dramatically, distributing large quantities of essential goods to veterans, families, shelters, and disaster victims.

Today, Mike serves on multiple nonprofit boards, works with numerous ministries and community groups, and continues delivering aid across Berks County and beyond. The man who once felt forgotten now dedicates his life to ensuring no veteran feels alone. Mike's story is not just one of survival — it is one of resilience, faith, and purpose. Having walked through darkness himself, he now spends his life lighting the way for others.



Just a Few More Photos from Gather the Guitars



Linda and Brian - the organizers of Gather the Guitars! Thank you!



In response to Glen (at left) calling for sponsors, Joe Bahret (above) responded immediately with a \$100 donation for toilet paper to stock our free Toiletries Closet.



The silent auction contained 72 items including restaurant gift cards, houseplants, wall art, sport items, a handmade pastry board, a quilt, needlepoint throw pillows and clothing -- such as the beautiful coat modeled by this auction winner.



Volunteers! Check out our new updated Link and QR code to schedule your volunteer time!

Hi all, Art here: I know that many of our regular volunteers just show up every week, or tell me when they will not be around, and that is fine! But for folks with more complicated schedules, we do have the ability to sign up online, and the app has been newly upgraded, complete with a new link below!

You can now sign up for Saturday for either:

- a regular 8:30-11:30 shift or an
- early 8:30-10 shift; or even a
- later, 10-11:30 clean-up shift.

You can also sign up to volunteer for Sunday afternoon activities for our shelter program, where unhoused folks can relax in a safe, comfortable, environment. You can even sign up to help sort and fold clothing on Wednesday afternoons from 1-3pm. Use this link: ttsu.me/e4c7aecz or the volunteer QR code at right.



AND

If you sign up for kitchen duty, you will be blessed to work with Rondell Holmes, our Kitchen Coordinator (also known as the ***Kitchen King***), his daughter Mimi, and other great volunteers.



Open Mic



Neighbors and volunteers got together for an afternoon open mic event in early March. Our talented crew presented all types of music – from Frank Sinatra to traditional Irish to folk – and poetry. Please join us in a few months to perform or watch when we gather again.



The Free Store

Looking for something to do on Wednesday afternoons? Come join us at 1:30 as we sort donations and restock the Free Store that First Church of the Brethren runs on Fridays along with their Food Pantry. Gather the Spirit also pulls items from those donations for people who come to Gather the Spirit on Saturdays and Sundays. Winter clothing for all ages, shoes, boots, underwear, and housewares continue to be at the top of the needs list. Contact Ann (avandyke3@outlook.com) to volunteer or drop off donations.

Our Wishes

As we work on various Gather the Spirit activities, board members and volunteers often wish for items that would help us to better serve our community. One of our wishes in the last newsletter was cabinets for storing non-perishable foods that we use for Saturday breakfasts and Sunday warming/cooling shelter meals. In response, an anonymous newsletter reader blessed us with the purchase of four cabinets!



If you can make a wish come true, items can be dropped off Saturdays from 9:00 to 11:00 am at the Gather the Spirit Community Center, 219 Hummel Street, Harrisburg or left at any time on the porch at 4384 North 6th Street, Harrisburg.

Rondell's wish: Rondell hopes for new or used sleeping bags for neighbors who are sleeping outdoors in tents or on the sidewalk.



Jordan's wish: Jordan wishes for large size men's shoes (new or gently used) and socks for our Saturday breakfast and Sunday afternoon shelter visitors. Few of our neighbors have cars, and walking everywhere wears out shoes quickly. Neighbors often come to the community center wearing shoes with holes or broken soles.



Ann's wish: Ann hopes for more backpacks – empty or stocked with a few emergency toiletries – to share with our unhoused visitors, who must carry their belongings with them when they leave their tent or sleeping bag.

Pat's wish: Pat's wish this month is the same as last month – Underwear in all sizes for men, women, and children. Underwear is something we rarely receive among our donations, but neighbors often confidentially tell us that it is a big need.



Gail's wish: Gail wishes for more shampoo and soap to stock the Free Toiletries Closet.

Mike's wish: Mike, who volunteers at the Sunday shelter, hopes for lighter jackets for our guests as spring approaches.



IDs

We meet with people who are requesting help to get their ID, driver's license or birth certificate at two small tables in a corner of fellowship hall. A young man, G, in his 20s sat down at the table where I was sitting just in time to be told that we were all out of money for that Saturday. We always ask people to come back the following week and to get to the ID tables as close to 9:00 am as possible. But when I told G he would have to wait a week, his eyes welled up, and he began explaining how he learned about us and what was going on in his life. That morning G had stopped at a corner store a few blocks away. The man at the store knew G's family, and when he learned that G could not get access to his bank account without a current ID and that G had not been able to buy food, that kind man gave G some chicken to eat on the spot and told him about Gather the Spirit. G was also not able to go back to work without a renewed ID, which costs \$44.50. The other Board member who heard G's story and I were both very aware that, because of limited funds, the Board had been forced to limit ID checks to eight a week. We looked at each other and decided to issue nine checks. We rarely do that, but a person's wellbeing is what we most value, and we were confident the Board would forgive us! G was so relieved and grateful that he blessed us several times and promised to come back to show us his new ID. Being a check-writer for Gather the Spirit is both a joyful and a very sad task.

Another young man, T, came to a Saturday breakfast for a good meal and hoped we could help him get an ID. He told us that he had just been released from prison and said, "So many people get out and they don't have anything...no clothes, no ID and nowhere to go. The case managers pressure you to get a job, but they don't give you the resources you need to get one." T's reaction when we gave him a check to get his ID was the same reaction we see over and over. He was relieved and grateful. T left Gather the Spirit with a full stomach, a check to PennDOT, some very needed toiletries, socks, and a warm hoodie. And he left knowing that people he had never met before cared about him. -Ann Van Dyke

Grants and Gifts



Blue Cross gifted our English as a Second Language program with \$600 for books and supplies. We are grateful for this support for our classes that help our neighbors improve their English language skills.



The Veterans Coalition of PA filled an SUV and trailer with boxes of toilet tissue, wipes and other items for our Toiletries Closet. Check out the "Profile of a Partner" article in this newsletter to learn more about this group.

Free Toiletries Closet

S.O.S. Snow or Spring? We always need help. Toiletries was recently blessed to have a wonderful delivery of toilet paper and wipes from a Veteran's Group that attended Gather the Guitars. I can't tell you how grateful the toiletries team is to have this to hand out. What we still need, badly, are the small personal toiletry items that 140+ Allison Hill neighbors line up each Saturday morning to receive just 2 at our amazing breakfast. We have NO toiletry budget and run totally on donations.

Can you help? The items we most need are dishwashing soap (Dawn, Ajax, etc.), large bars of soap, toothpaste, shampoo, body wash, razors, cleaning spray, lotion, hand sanitizer, gloves, socks, and laundry pods (we break large containers into packs of 4-5). Toiletries may be dropped off Saturdays from 9:00 to 11:00 am at the Gather the Spirit Community Center in First Church of the Brethren (219 Hummel Street, Harrisburg, PA 17110) or at 881 Mandy Lane, Camp Hill, PA 17011. We also welcome cash donations. You can pass cash to me, Gail, on Saturdays or send a check marked "toiletries" to treasurer Austin Cheers, CPA, Miller Dixon Drake, PC, 701 N 2nd Street, Harrisburg, PA 17102. Every item helps. Thank you so much. Gail Ismart (gismart@mac.com or 717-737-1122)





You're invited to an Event at our Host Church !




[Registration](#) is now open for the second annual Shalom Summit: Disciples Pursuing Racially Just Neighborhoods, happening on Saturday, April 25, 2026, at Harrisburg First Church of the Brethren.

Speakers and authors Dominique Gilliard, Isaac Villegas, & Sheila Wise Rowe will address this year's theme of Prophetic Resistance through topics of racial reconciliation, immigrant justice, and healing racial trauma.

 Date: Saturday, April 25, 2026

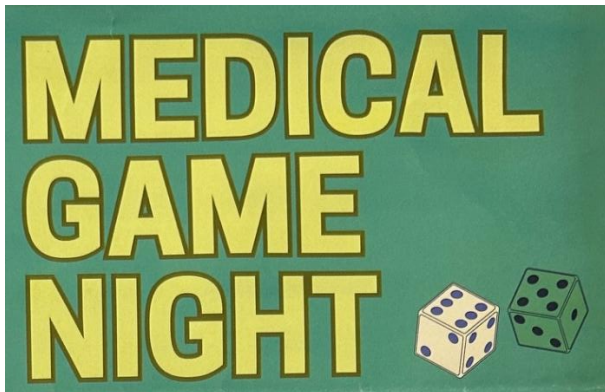
 Time: 8:00 am to 5:00 pm (registration 8-9)

 Cost: \$20 (includes continental breakfast)

 Location: Harrisburg First Church of the Brethren, 219 Hummel Street, Harrisburg, PA 17104

Learn more and register: <https://thejourneyharrisburg.org/shalom-summit/>

Sharing News from Our Friends



Gather the Spirit regularly refers neighborhood folks to the essential medical and dental services offered at no cost right around the block from us by the health ministries of Christ Lutheran Church. Help our neighbors at Christ Lutheran Church raise money for their health ministries while you enjoy a night of games with a medical theme. The event will occur at:

Tree of Life Lutheran Church,
1492 Linglestown Road
Harrisburg, PA 17110
June 13, 2026, from 5 – 8 pm

Choose your game level:

- *Competitive:* Doctor Doctor, War, Operation, Jeopardy
- *Just for Fun:* Life, Pandemic, Hospital Rush, Herd Mentality, What Do You Meme



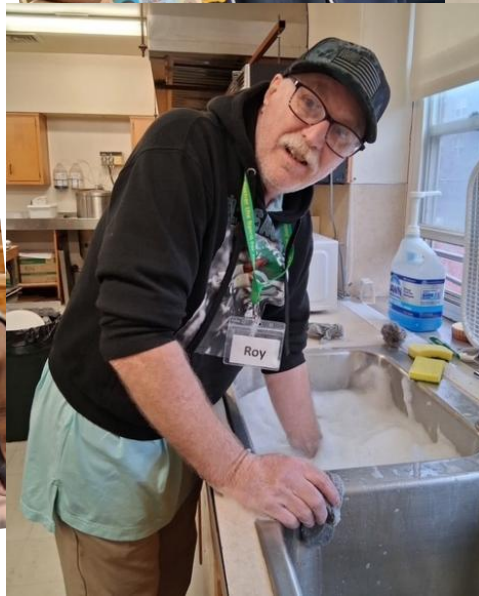
Christ Lutheran Church: 124 South 13th Street, Harrisburg, PA 17104 (717) 236-8382

- **Medical Clinic:** Free, nurse-run, walk-in clinic that provides simple lab tests, basic physical assessments, and health ed. Mon-Fri 10 am-2:30 pm. No appointment needed. (717) 260-9320.
- **Dental Clinic:** Volunteer dentists, support staff, and translators offer care 3 days a month for urgent dental conditions requiring simple extractions and fillings. No appointments, all walk-in, first-come-first-served, free of charge. Call to learn upcoming dates.
- **Fit on the Hill:** Exercise class is held Saturdays at 9:00 am. All ability levels are welcome.
- **Spiritual Care:** Pastor Best offers spiritual care to church members, community residents, and partner organizations. Please let him know if you would like to talk about how he can provide care. He is in the Clinic waiting area from 1:00-2:00 pm every Wednesday to chat.

Meet Some of our Neighbors and Volunteers



More Neighbors and Volunteers



And More



Tell Us How to Use Your Donation!

If one of our activities especially touches your heart, direct your donation to that.

- Sponsor an ID, driver's license or birth certificate. Donate \$42.50 for an ID or license or \$20 for a birth certificate. (Indicate "vital documents" on your check or with your donation.)
- Sponsor one Saturday breakfast for \$250 **AND**, if you'd like, bring your own crew to do the serving. Contact Art at artwilliams7@gmail.com to arrange a Saturday of your choice.
- Sponsor an English textbook for \$10. (Indicate "ESL" on your check or with your donation.)
- Help sponsor a toiletries distribution. (Indicate "toiletries" on your check or with your donation.) You can also drop off toiletries at the community center any Saturday morning or leave them anytime on the porch at 4384 North 6th Street in Harrisburg.



Checks for donations can be mailed to: **Austin Cheers, CPA,**
Miller Dixon Drake, PC, 701 N 2nd Street, Harrisburg, PA 17102

You may also use Paypal with the address gtsfjinfohbg@gmail.com
[paypal.me/Gather the Spirit?country.x=US&locale.x=en_US](https://www.paypal.me/GathertheSpirit?country.x=US&locale.x=en_US)
venmo us @Gather the Spirit or donate online: gatherthespiritforjustice.org



You can also help by volunteering: VOLUNTEER every Saturday morning, 9 to 11 am for coffee and conversation! Volunteers prepare and serve snacks, welcome and interact with guests, and assist with setup and/or cleanup. To volunteer, contact Art at artwilliams7@gmail.com or drop by any Saturday morning. This link will take you to our volunteer signup page: <https://ttsu.me/zu5ejm> Or contact Glen at gdunbar47@gmail.com to volunteer in English as a Second Language classes.

Contact Information

Located in First Church of the Brethren, 219 Hummel Street, Harrisburg, PA 17104
gatherthespiritforjustice.org

Patricia Allen	patricialeschanoallen@gmail.com	Art Williams	artwilliams7@gmail.com
Brian DeBease	brian.debease@scouting.org	Glen Dunbar	gdunbar47@gmail.com
Ann Van Dyke	avandyke3@outlook.com	Linda DeBease	ldebease@icloud.com
Mary Kelly	kellyfamily17011@gmail.com	Kim Jarrett	kimjarrett6640@gmail.com
Sol Vazquez-Otero	confidential	Anita Stabile	anita.stabile@verizon.net
Shannon Miller	amarantha0313@gmail.com	Jennifer Cortes	cortes.gin87@gmail.com

Mailing address for checks: Austin Cheers, CPA, Miller Dixon Drake, PC, 701 N 2nd Street, Harrisburg, PA 17102

OUR MISSION: Gather the Spirit for Justice seeks to strengthen community in Allison Hill, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.



Gather the Spirit volunteers joined Market Square volunteers to serve Sunday morning breakfast at Market Square.