



THE WEST VIRGINIA INSTITUTE FOR SPIRITUALITY

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NEWS FROM WVIS

2025 #3

Message from our Executive Director

Sr. Cheryl Clemons, OSU, PhD

Dear friends of WVIS,

During these hot summer days it's easy to feel oppressed by the heat. The state of our world can also feel oppressive. Wars, hatred, division, natural disasters, poverty, all the "-isms" of modern culture—it can feel overwhelming *and* consequently paralyzing. Enter the 2025 WVIS theme: HOPE.



As many of you know, Pope Francis declared 2025 a Jubilee Year of Hope. I've recently returned from a Jubilee pilgrimage to Italy. Looking back on that time, I see connections between Hope and my pilgrimage experience that culminated in walking through the Holy Door at each of Rome's major basilicas.

Hope, like pilgrimage:

- must be *chosen*. Though seeds of this virtue lie within us, they must be cultivated through choices of attitudes and behaviors.
- demands letting go. While pilgrimage urges us to "travel light," let go of expectations, and be open to surprises (like a new pope!), Hope calls us to turn loose from prejudice, inertia, fear, looking for darkness instead of light. Hope reminds us that we by grace can make God's world better.
- is not easy and takes work. Just as flight delays, fatigue, overcrowding, unexpected ticket cancellations can threaten the spiritual fruits of pilgrimage, so too pessimism and negativity can threaten Hope.
- requires persistence. Just as it's tempting to "give up" when cobblestone walking distances between busses and anticipated sites becomes too tiresome, so too hope can wane in the face of 24-hour news cycles with endless bad news.
- leads to transformation. Pilgrimage ends with arrival at a sacred site, but one returns home made new by the experience. So too Hope is like walking through a Holy Door, leaving behind all that is not of God, of love, and embracing all that is life and joy.

I now see that Hope itself is a pilgrimage, led by God's Spirit who, in the words of the Pentecost hymn, is "in our labor, rest most sweet; grateful coolness in the heat; solace in the midst of woe." Let us rejoice that we have one another as pilgrim companions as we walk through the Holy Door of Hope each day.

May God bless your days with the graces you most need!

Sr. Cheryl Clemons, OSU, PhD, Executive Director

We need your input! So many people get their news online these days that WVIS is considering putting the newsletter online beginning in 2026. Let us know how you feel. Please email sally@sayyes2yourlife.org OR text your name and thoughts to 919-418-7125. Thank you.

Message from our Board President

Rev. David S. Lake

Pastor, First United Methodist Church
Waynesburg, PA
dslake2000@gmail.com



Hello WVIS Community,

I do not remember when or from where I downloaded this picture. It speaks volumes. So often we get so hung up on the stuff of today that we lose sight of what is important. I am mindful of the words from 1 Peter 5:7:

"Cast all your anxiety on God, because God cares for you."

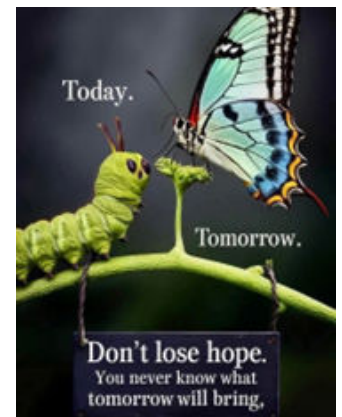
When we get all tangled up in our daily activities, it is easy to forget that we are cared for and given the hope that only comes through our relationship with Almighty God.

Perhaps this picture should be printed and placed on our bathroom mirrors to remind us first thing in the mornings and throughout the day that our hope is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

May the Hope of the Almighty be with you always!

Peace,

Rev. David S. Lake





Celebrating Founding Board President, Linda L. Cooper

As the first board president of the West Virginia Institute for Spirituality, Linda L. Cooper brought wisdom, courage, and a steady hand to a mission just finding its footing. Serving faithfully from 1999 through 2002, she supported Sr. Carole Riley, the Executive Director, through the complex task of relocating the Institute—from its original home at the Cenacle Retreat House, through a temporary location at 1414 Virginia Street East, to its current site, which has now served the WVIS mission for 25 years. Linda helped shape not only the structure of our organization, but its very spirit.

Linda was uniquely gifted for this leadership role. Trained in the WVIS spiritual direction program in the mid-1990s, Linda responded to a profound call to bring her exceptional gifts to those seeking a deeper relationship with God. Those who knew her personally experienced her rare gift of presence. She listened. She attended. She loved with an open heart. She encountered suffering with compassion, serving as a companion and guide through life's challenges—for her therapy clients, her family, and her friends.

Linda's gift was collaborative leadership. She led not by command, but by connection—bringing people together not just around a table, but around a shared purpose. She didn't lead by dominating the room; she led by listening, drawing out the wisdom in others, and guiding with quiet confidence. In every meeting, she made people feel heard and valued. She believed that the best decisions were made not alone, but together. Her collaborative spirit set the tone for who we are today—not just in what we do, but in how we do it. Linda understood that real progress happens when people feel seen, supported, and included. And because of her, we moved forward not just as an

organization, but as a community.

Following her cancer diagnosis in 2020, Linda began to write poetry as a way to chronicle her journey. With deep spiritual and existential reflection, she reexamined life, relationships, and meaning. As her body weakened, her spirit only deepened—offering the fruit of a life lived with intentionality, rooted in purpose, and marked by a deep love for others. With unwavering faith and open arms, she embraced each moment, meeting life as it unfolded. This is the legacy she leaves for all who knew her personally—or through an encounter with the community she helped shape. What she helped seed continues to grow in the enduring mission of WVIS.

Linda died on May 6, 2025—dying as she lived: denying nothing, and meeting what came to her with grace, dignity, and love.



Cindy Neely a Spiritual Director, Supervisor, and Associate Ministry Director, Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Recovering Our Soul Connections

Sexual abuse can reach every level of our being and leave us feeling distant from ourselves and from God. Knowing that some wounds can only be healed by an experience of the love of God, WVIS spiritual directors Cindy Neely, Liz Deal and North Carolina spiritual director Khristi Ford created *Recovering Our Soul Connections*, a retreat for women who suffer because of childhood abuse. In June, Cindy and Liz, with assistance from Debbie del Corro El-Chayeb led the third Recovering Our Soul Connections Retreat at St. Francis Springs Prayer Center in North Carolina.

Prior to coming together, the directors and participants met online for group spiritual direction using Joyce Rupp's book, *Open the Door*. The practice of daily

Leave a legacy that will help others by contributing to WVIS through The Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation. You can donate online by going to [The Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation \(tgkvf.org\)](https://tgkvf.org) and donate to the WVIS Endowment Fund or mail your donation to WVIS Fund, c/o The Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation, P.O. Box 3041, Charleston WV 25331. Contact Michelle Foster, at 304-346-3634 for more information.

prayer and reflection created a sense of safety among the women and allowed for deep sharing and mutual care. Said one, "I think because of the bond we had before we started, we were able to go deeper into ourselves which leads to better healing."

Honoring the interconnection of body, mind, and spirit, the weekend included exploration of Sacred Scripture, music, movement, expressive arts, and liturgy to create a sanctuary of healing. *"The presence of God permeated the room with song, prayer, sharing, visuals – pictures, ceremonies, sacred items and the holy presence of the leaders,"* said one retreatant.

I am deeply moved every time we offer this retreat. Over three days, God transforms the women physically, emotionally, and spiritually, opening them up to receive Divine Love they will share when they leave and accepting, perhaps for the first time, their own worth and freedom. One woman describes the retreat as *"An experience to own the truth of my innocence and the path forward to invite Jesus, God into my healing."* Another named the most helpful and challenging part of the retreat as, *"Using my voice – the opportunities to speak and be heard."*

When asked if they would recommend the retreat, the responses were overwhelmingly positive.

Retreatants shared that it was "uncomfortable" but it was important

to their healing. Others shared how great it was to laugh and that they recognized that God graced them with a beautiful balance of painful moments for healing and the balm of laughter.

Each woman made a financial commitment to the retreat, but finances do not prevent participating. It is our hope to bring this retreat to WVIS in 2026. If you are interested in participating or providing sponsorship

funding, please email Liz Deal at lizjdeal@gmail.com.



Liz Deal is an Associate Spiritual Director and Associate Ministry Director affiliated with WVIS. Huntington, WV.



The intermingled scarves represented the lives of each participant.

Celebrating WVIS Volunteers

"Volunteers do not necessarily have the time; they just have the heart." ~ Elizabeth Andrew

WVIS' remarkable volunteers may be "behind the scenes" but they are front and center in making WVIS the welcoming and hospitable retreat center it is. How each found their way to WVIS is unique, but what they all hold in common is a strong connection to WVIS and "the heart" to serve. We want to take this opportunity to introduce them and to express our heartfelt gratitude for their generosity of time, expertise, and their dedication to our Mission. Join us in thanking them for their valuable contributions.

Rose Marie DeBias, retired CPA, assists in administrative work for WVIS Associate Spiritual Direction Training program



Debbie Wright and Megan Harris. As a retired construction project manager, Debbie brings invaluable insight for WVIS campus needs. Megan, a former chemical engineer and HR manager, assists Sr. Mary Irene Sorber, SC, in many ways including music preparation, garden expertise, coordination of birthday cards, and managing WVIS book collections.



Midge Park and Ann Winton. Midge, a professional hair stylist and artist is a talented cook and prepares delicious meals for all retreatants. Ann, a catechist at Blessed Sacrament Church, prepares all welcome packets for retreatants and oversees all retreatant art material.



Bridget Posey, retired from WV State Workers Compensation, assists in preparation for all Celebrate the Spirit events held at Trinity Lutheran Evangelical Church. (Seen here with Sr. Molly)



Can you help? We would welcome anyone who enjoys being with nature and would have time to help keep our gardens beautiful. If this is you, please contact Sr. Mary Irene (wvismaryirene@aol.com) or Sr. Molly (wvissrmolly@aol.com.)

Reflections and Happenings

What is a haiku?

Originating in 17th century Japan, haikus provide us with a prayer form that allows us to capture those fleeting moments in nature and life. They can serve as a powerful source for spiritual prayer and/or meditation offering a concise and profound way to express thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Often haikus use subtle imagery to evoke emotions and to gently leave space to invite the readers' interpretation or opportunity for meditation.

How do I write a haiku? Haiku prayers are made up of 17 syllables in three lines of writing. The first line contains 5 syllables, the second line 7 syllables, and the third line 5 syllables (5-7-5.) To identify syllables, you listen to the musical 'clap' beats in words. Looking at the word "Yearling" in the haiku (image), hear the two syllables: "Year" and "ling." What in your life would you like to capture in a haiku? Give it a try.

Our thanks to WVIS Associate Spiritual Jerry Rutledge for submitting this beautiful imagery of a "Haiku of Seasons"



After Five Years - Celebrate the Spirit Remains Strong

January 1, 2025 marked five years since a group of dedicated people, passionate about recovery, began *Celebrate the Spirit* (CTS.) The first meetings took place the winter of 2020 in the chapel "Nazareth" at WVIS, where WVIS hosted monthly meetings focusing on the 12 Steps of Spirituality developed by AA. Meaningful presentations, rich group sharing, prayer, and delicious meals were the hallmarks of those meetings. Then in February 2020 we experienced the pandemic, and life changed dramatically!

Adapting to this new reality of isolation, technology came to our aid; and many of us learned new skills in meeting via Zoom! We continued the vision and inspiration of presenting the 12 steps through a different medium. In this challenging time, the WVIS CTS team reached out to the underserved at St. Francis Hospital Addiction Healing Center for their patients to learn about 12 Step Spirituality, and a partnership formed! July 8, 2025 marks four years since WVIS CTS members first Zoomed in to the Addiction Healing Center to be with patients at the center and to share experience, strength and hope with each other. In April, we began meeting in person with the patients, CTS members, and Hospital Addiction Counselors. These weekly meetings continue as times of reverent listening to each other's stories and learning ways to maintain sobriety and how to support one another on the journey.



Celebrate the Spirit team members Bob Sylvester, Sr. Molly Maloney, OSF, Meilani Wilson, and Joe Deegan standing outside the St. Francis Hospital Addiction Healing Center.

Celebrate the Spirit is planning its next event. It will be held on **Saturday, September 27, 2025**, at Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1600 Kanawha Blvd. E, Charleston, WV. Doors will open at 10:30 a.m. Lunch will be provided, and we will conclude at 1:30 p.m. All are welcome!

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