



candidate bios
annual meeting 2025

INTRODUCTION

Pursuant to the bylaws of Shepherd of the Valley, the Nominating Committee is composed of five members: two elected by the Church Council from its own membership and three elected by the congregation at the Annual Meeting. These members each serve a one year term.

At the 2024 Annual Meeting, Hanna Gaertner, Kari Thielke, and Dan Webb were elected to the Nominating Committee by the congregation. The Church Council elected Nancy Fravel and Emily Nesse to serve from its membership.

The Nominating Committee is tasked to nominate a candidate for each open Council seat and no less than three candidates for the next year's Nominating Committee. They have secured the consent of each candidate nominated.

At the Annual Meeting, the congregation is asked to affirm the two nominees for Church Council and elect three members to the Nominating Committee from the slate of five candidates. The following biographies are intended to help the congregation get to know these nominees and candidates.

CHURCH COUNCIL



Sam Crosswell



Andrew Dinndorf
Treasurer



Nancy Fravel



Mark Gaertner
President



Max Gierke
term ending



Jim Jefferis



Emily Nesse
Secretary



Kris Olson
term ending



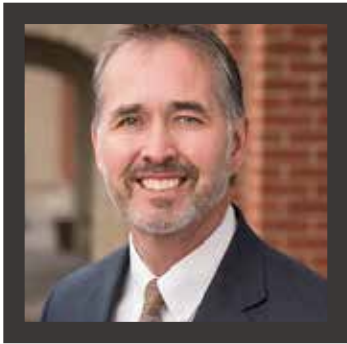
Jill Whisler



Jeremy King
Ex-officio member

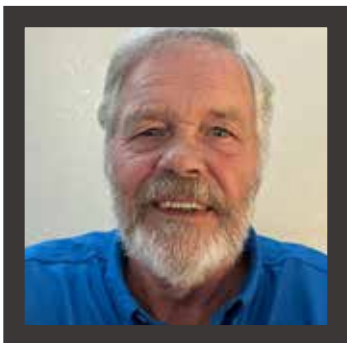
CHURCH COUNCIL NOMINEES

STEFEN THIELKE



Stefen Thielke and his family have been part of Shepherd since 2011, drawn by the depth of its youth ministry and the energy of the Circuit program. With leadership experience spanning sports teams, small groups, nonprofit boards, and church ministries, Stefen brings a thoughtful and servant-hearted presence to the council. He currently leads a men's group called brotHERhood and serves on several local and international ministry boards. Stefen is passionate about service and embraces opportunities that challenge his comfort zone and grow his faith. Now in a season of life with more capacity to serve, he's eager to contribute to Shepherd's evolving mission. His hope is that Shepherd continues to make a meaningful impact both locally and globally, with a consistent Gospel-centered message.

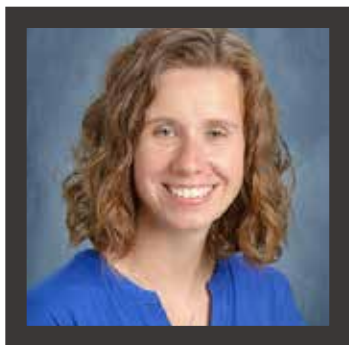
JEFF ROBERTSON



Jeff Robertson has been part of the Shepherd community for 13 years, originally drawn in by his daughter's involvement, meaningful sermons, and the warmth of the congregation. With a career as CEO of a healthcare system and extensive leadership experience in churches and community organizations, Jeff brings seasoned wisdom and spiritual depth to his role. He currently serves as a Bible Study Fellowship Group Leader and has a passion for helping others grow in their relationship with Christ. Jeff is excited to serve on the council as a way to use his gifts to advance God's Kingdom. His hope is for Shepherd to be a church where people encounter God deeply—both inside and outside its walls—and one that boldly holds to the truth of the Gospel in every season.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE CANDIDATES

THERESA HELMS



Theresa Helms and her husband, Brian, began attending Shepherd in 2019 with their three children—Lucas (10), Norah (12), and Emmett (13). They have lived in Lake Elmo for nine years, a small menagerie of pets, where Theresa works in Mahtomedi as an Early Childhood Special Education Teacher. She enjoys time on the lake with her family, fishing, swimming, and gardening. Over the past five years, Theresa has served in many volunteer roles, including as an sovKids teacher (K–3), Circuit student check-in, and various VBS positions. She loves watching children learn about Jesus, build connections at church, and grow in faith. Guided by her belief in shining Christ’s light in all circumstances, Theresa finds joy in using her God-given strengths to serve children and share His love.

JOHN KROMER



A member of Shepherd for over 20 years, John has built strong connections through small groups and served in small group ministry as both a member and leader for nearly two decades. He has also led Senior High Circuits for many years and participated in several mission trips. To him, following Jesus means submitting to His will rather than yielding to worldly pressures. He and his wife, Jamie, have raised three boys, welcomed three daughters-in-law, and cherish time with their three grandchildren. Now retired from a CPA career and running a retail business in Hudson, he’s enjoying this new season of life.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE CANDIDATES

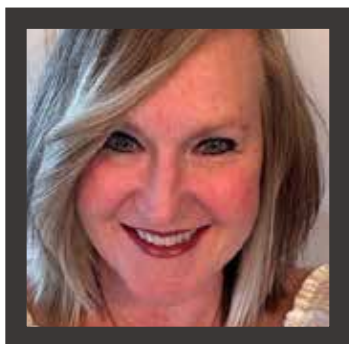
DEREK OLSON



Derek and his wife Kris have been part of the Shepherd community for over 30 years, and he's served in a variety of roles, including church council member, small group leader, greeter, usher, and communion team member. He is currently active on both the usher and communion teams and participates in a men's and a couples' small group, experiences he considers deeply meaningful. To him, following Jesus means recognizing a need for grace and striving to love, serve, and live in a way that reflects Christ. He's passionate about helping others connect to Jesus, in line with Shepherd's mission.

Derek and Kris moved to Stillwater to be closer to Shepherd, the church they chose to center their lives around. They were married at Shepherd, and their three children—Kaija, Ben, and Anna—were all baptized and confirmed there. Derek has been a 6th grade teacher for 34 years, the last 24 in the Stillwater district, and also teaches graduate education courses at UW—River Falls.

MARY WEBB



Mary loves building new friendships and getting to know others in the church community. She helps facilitate the women's Bible study on Tuesday mornings, which keeps her rooted in God's Word, and has served with sovKids for over a decade. To her, following Jesus means living to please Him—embracing both the joys and the callings that stretch her beyond comfort. Community and serving others are central to her faith. A former hair stylist of 25 years, she is now a stay-at-home mom. She and her husband, Dan, have two teenage daughters, Norah and Claudia.

BRI WHISLER



Bri grew up in sovKids and Circuit programs and now enjoys the young adult community. She serves as a 10th grade girls Circuit leader, participated in both Jr and Sr High mission trips this summer, and loves her small group. On Sundays, she can often be found in the tech booth running slides. To Bri, following Jesus means walking side by side with Him—guided, loved, and shown grace. She believes Jesus calls us into community, where she most clearly sees His character and love. Bri lives in Oakdale with her roommate, Jessie Gosso. The oldest of three brothers—Charley, Tommy, and Rob—she is the daughter of Jill and Brian Whisler, and teaches Kindergarten at Lily Lake Elementary in Stillwater.



SHEPHERD
OF THE VALLEY

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