



# THE SPIRE

WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
Pittsburgh, PA

My Friends,

Every new year we make our resolutions about procrastinating and organizing and dieting and exercising. But how many days into the new year will it be before we break those resolutions about procrastinating and organizing and dieting and exercising!

More than a New Year's resolution, what we really seek is a life that is steady and focused and shaped by God's will. Isn't that why we come to worship, why we pray, why we share in fellowship groups and mission activities? We seek a time and place to hear God's word and offer our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ.

So much of how we live is scrambling, fumbling, wandering around the day-to-day journeys we make. We forget what quietness and contemplation are, even forgetting who God is and how God was revealed in the man from Galilee, Jesus of Nazareth.

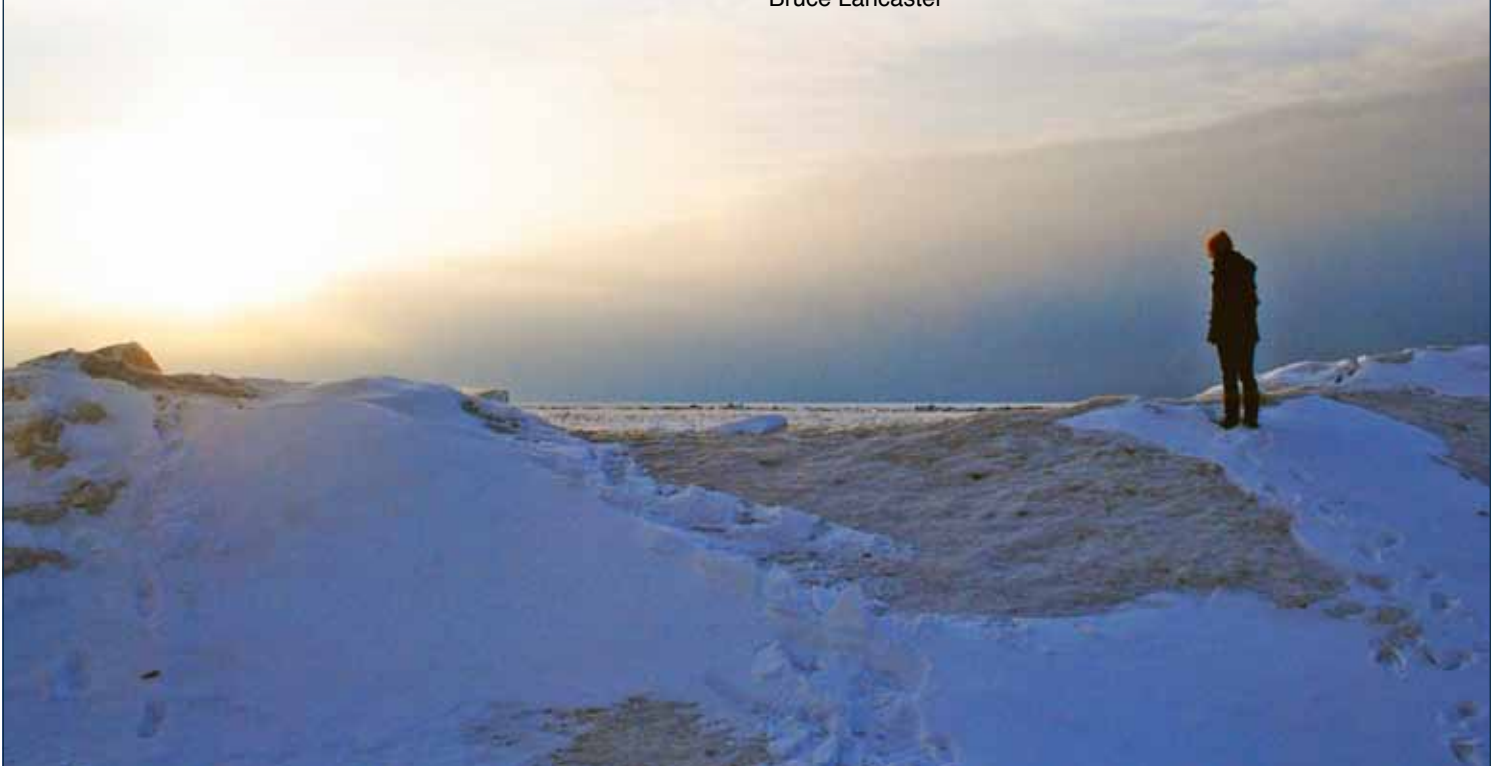
Jesus knew what it was like to be pressed in by life, but he also knew the steadiness that kept him from ever abandoning his commitment to God, no matter the pressure. More than making a resolution, we pray we could be like him.

Each day, let's pray for more faith with less cockiness, more hope with less arrogance, more love with less boastfulness, more serenity with less apprehension, more honesty with less denial.

When we do that, by the power of the Spirit we can become more of who God wants us to be, and by God's grace, we can be focused and steadied and shaped by God's will.

And what a happy new year that will be!

Thanks and blessings,  
Bruce Lancaster



*Our Mission: We seek to be a caring community of faith committed to bringing people to Christ and developing their faith through worshiping God together, teaching the faith, and serving in mission.*

**PASTORS**

DR. BRUCE LANCASTER, *Interim Senior Pastor,  
Head of Staff*

REV. LOUISE ROGERS, *Associate Pastor  
for Congregational Care*

REV. JASON FREYER, *Associate Pastor  
for the Bridge, Youth & Media*

**ADMINISTRATIVE & BUSINESS SUPPORT**

PEG KINSEY, *Executive Assistant to the Pastors*

CINDY BINGHAM, *Church Business Administrator*

KIMBERLY DUNKOVICH, *Associate Accountant*

MANDY THOMAS, *Project Manager*

**CHRISTIAN EDUCATION**

NATALIE BROWN, *Director of Children's & Family  
Ministry*

DEBB EGLI, *Assistant Director of Children's & Family  
Ministry*

ED SUTTER, *Director of Middle School Ministry &  
Family Counseling*

LAURA ECKLIN, *Coordinator of Children's & Youth  
Ministry*

**COMMUNICATIONS**

ANNA HINER, *Communications & Database Manager*

JEANNIE SCHOTT, *Graphic Design &  
Print/Web Manager*

LAURA WHITCOMB, *Print Room Assistant*

**MUSIC & ARTS**

CHRISTINE HESTWOOD, *Director*

LORRAINE MILOVAC, *Assistant Director*

JIM BURNS, *Organist*

EILEEN MURRAY, *Administrative Assistant*

**PROPERTY**

CHARLEY RICHARDSON, *Property Manager*

**VOLUNTEER MINISTRY**

JAN BAUMANN, *Volunteer Coordinator*

CARA DANIELE, *Kitchen Coordinator*

**WESTMINSTER RECREATION & OUTREACH  
CENTER (WROC)**

KATHY LONG, *Director*

**NURSERY SCHOOL**

412-835-2906

**CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER**

412-835-9450

Staff email addresses and phone extensions are available on our website, [www.westminster-church.org](http://www.westminster-church.org).

Read the *Spire* online at:

[www.westminster-church.org](http://www.westminster-church.org)

*The Spire* is published monthly by the church staff from September through June. Contributions can be made by emailing a Word document to *Spire* editor Sara Kyle at [sara@ruhlekyle.org](mailto:sara@ruhlekyle.org). The deadline for submitting an article is the fifth day of every month for the following month's issue. Please include the author's name, telephone number, email address, and a title. All articles are subject to editing.

**3 Worship**

Sunday Worship Services

Upcoming Events

Epiphany

**4 Spiritual Growth**

Westminster Seminars

Diary of a Lunatic: Reboot

Between Here and There

From a Daughter's Heart

Ten Commandments Workshop

Adult Spiritual Development

Westminster Book Group

We Are the Church...Let's Act Like It

**10 Outreach**

WROC: Yoga4cancer

The Westminster Gifting Tree: A Tradition of Giving

**12 Caring Community**

Health, Despair, and Mortality

Baptism of the Lord and the New Year

Baptisms

Deaths

**14 Other**




Financial Report

2020 Stewardship Campaign Update




Church Closing Policy

What Is Per Capita?

### Traditional Worship

 Sundays
 8:30 & 11:00 a.m.
 Sanctuary

### The Bridge Contemporary Worship

 Sundays
 9:45 a.m.
 WROC

*The Lord's Supper is celebrated the first Sunday of each month.  
Gluten-free wafers are available at all services.*

### Upcoming Events

**06** Epiphany  
JAN

**12** Baptism of  
the Lord  
JAN

**26** Congregational  
Meeting  
JAN

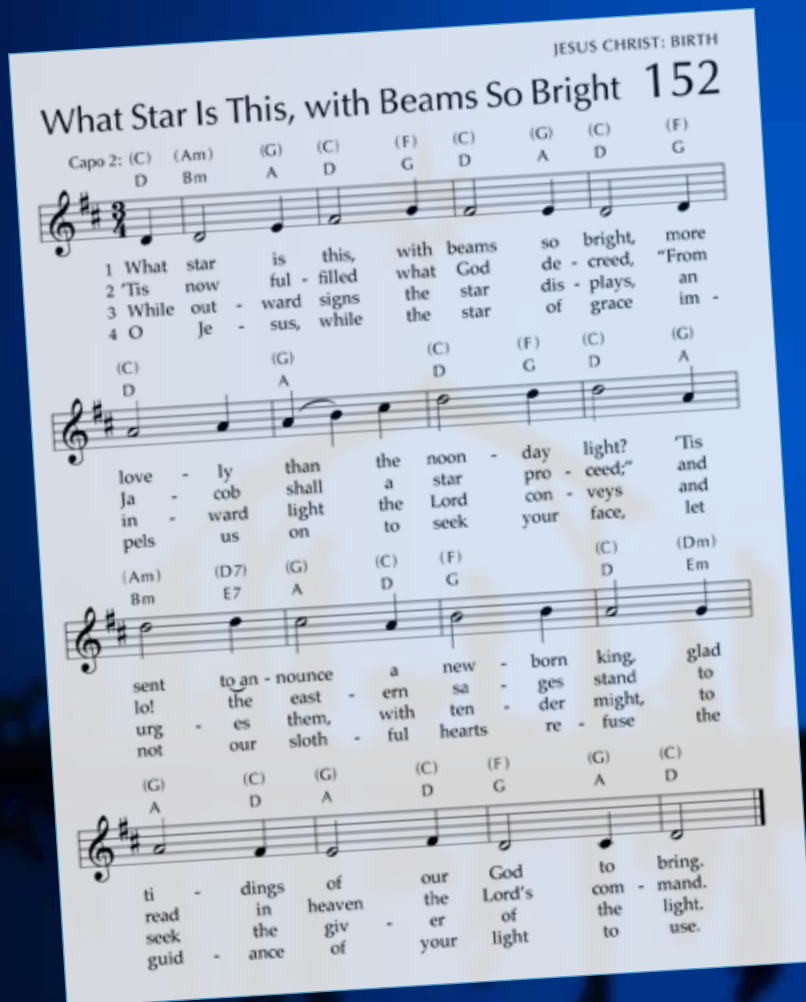
# Epiphany

The following hymn illustrates three lights of Epiphany: the light of the star leading the Magi to the Christ-child, the inward light inspiring their journey, and Christ who is the Light of the world.

JESUS CHRIST: BIRTH

## What Star Is This, with Beams So Bright 152

Capo 2: (C) (Am) (G) (C) (F) (C) (G) (C) (F)  
D Bm A D G D A D G



1 What star is this, with beams so bright, more  
2 'Tis now ful-filled, what God de-creed, "From  
3 While out-ward signs the star dis-plays, an  
4 O Je-sus, while the star of grace im-

love-ly than the noon-day light? 'Tis  
Ja-cob shall a star pro-ceed;" and  
in-ward light the Lord con-veys and  
pels us on to seek your face, let

sent to an-nounce a new-born king, glad  
lo! the east-ern sa-ges stand to  
urg-es them, with ten-der might, to  
not our sloth-ful hearts re-fuse the

ti-dings of our God to bring,  
read in heaven the Lord's com-mand.  
seek the giv-er of light,  
guid-ance of your light to use.





# Reboot

As a tech guy, I see a certain liturgy that comes with technology that doesn't want to work. At first, I will likely stare at the computer in question, hoping against all hope that it will eventually snap back to reality and start working all on its own. When it doesn't, words are often exclaimed that cannot be repeated here in the *Spire*. Following the poetic exclamation, and resolved that no amount of waiting is going to fix the problem in question, I arrive at the solution to end all technological solutions.

I reboot.

Anne Lamott says that "Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes," and she's absolutely right. Some of us may have internalized that the solution to almost every problem is holding CONTROL ALT DELETE on our computer until it has a moment to catch its "breath," and get back to work.

January is beautiful, because we as a society seem to have decided that it is reboot month. With New Year's Day, resolutions, and gym membership sales, we all realize there is value at this point in the year to say it's time to unplug, sit for a second, catch our breath, but then ultimately get back to what we were working on.

This is true on both a personal and a communal level. As individual people, reboots are vital to our survival. Taking inventory of the daily practices and routines we are engaged in, naming which are healthy and which need to change, is essential for our growth as human beings. My spiritual director frames this discussion in terms of a rule of life, an actual list of how I go through the day, the practices and disciplines I'm engaged in. What's the first thing I do when I wake up? What am I thinking through when I'm doing the dishes? Where are the spaces I've carved out for prayer through the day? Without checking in, I know that my heart has a tendency to wander, my habits drift away from where they need to be and settle into the channels of least resistance.

So sometimes I need a reboot. Sometimes I need to whack my heart back into place, to get things where they need to be. And having a season of reboot feels appropriate.

But it also strikes me that as a church, we are in a season of reboot. We have seen some seasons lately in the life of Westminster that none of us would like to revisit, I'm sure. We have been wounded. We have been scarred. We have been angry. We have been afraid. And all of that I would argue has been justified in the season that we have found ourselves in. No one would blame any of us for any of it.

But I am also sensing that a new season is upon us, and we need to tune our hearts to where we ought to be, where we want to be, where God is calling us to be. We are and always have been



a caring community, looking out for the least of these and being a presence in our neighborhood. We are and always have been a community of faith, centered in the love, mercy, generosity, and forgiveness of Jesus Christ. We are and always have been somewhere for folks to find their place, their passion, and their peace.

When overwhelming circumstances come, it's natural for us to fall into the paths of least resistance. It's easy to get angry at those who have done us wrong. It's easy to get obsessed with checking the newspaper for updates. It's easy to stop trusting people. It's easy to assume the worst. And while not everyone has found themselves in these places, maybe not even a majority of us, I know that I have drifted in and out. I know that I have carried anger. I know that I have carried fear. I know that I have carried a lack of trust. Time for a reboot.

We proclaim boldly each week that there is no amount of death that Jesus Christ can't resurrect. We proclaim boldly each week that not one of us is worthy to approach our God, which only makes God's grace that much more amazing. We proclaim boldly each week that we are a community of faith that can make a legitimate and lasting impact on the world around us. We proclaim these things boldly each week because we believe them. Deep down in my very bones, to the source of my soul, I believe.

Perhaps in this season we can be about the practices that will tune our hearts in the right direction. Perhaps in this season we can be on the lookout for those who are in need of forgiveness, recognizing that forgiveness is much more about our own soul than it is the soul of the offender. Perhaps in this season we can seek opportunities to give as we have received, to find a new generosity that we didn't know we were capable of. Perhaps in this season we can watch Christ breathe life into the dead places of our lives by sending an email, making a phone call, or visiting with a long lost friend. Whatever practices tune our hearts, this new year represents an exciting possibility to turn the calendar.

I have never been more excited about the future of Westminster Presbyterian Church. I hope you are with me! May the grace of Christ be with us all in this decade, and the decades to come!

– Jason Freyer

## BETWEEN HERE AND THERE

For the last several months I've anticipated puns about the year 2020. Hindsight is 20-20. This year you can have 20-20 vision. You get the point. I haven't heard nearly the number of them that I would have expected, so allow me to base this article almost wholly on a 2020 vision pun.

Vision takes a variety of forms in our lives. Of course, we have our physical vision (the things that we see), but we also have:

**Hope** – a vision for purpose in the future

**Goals** – visions of what we'd like to see play out in our lives

**Spiritual Vision** – the ways that we discern God's movement in our life

A truth in each of these remains the same: most of us could use glasses. We're not all that adept when it comes to crystal clear vision of what's going on in our lives or the world around us. There are lots of reasons this is true. Our biases and opinions cloud over truth, an overabundance of ideas pour into our lives every day, and often we numb ourselves to difficult and uncomfortable information. There's no doubt that it can be difficult to make any decision in light of all of this.

I have to wonder if these vision troubles are why we so often "bump our knees" on the corners of life. In the famous "Love Chapter" of scripture (1 Corinthians 13), Paul touches on how hard it is to use our spiritual vision on this side of God's kingdom. I love the King James Version here: "For now we see in a glass, darkly..." So much obscures the ways we look out into the world. And as anyone with vision issues can attest, moving through your house (let alone the world) is no small challenge.

As you may have picked up on from my previous articles, I am unendingly interested in helping people move through the world in healthy and satisfying ways. So I've been thinking about what

it looks like to improve our metaphoric vision this year. Hope certainly doesn't develop overnight, but a sense of direction and purpose can help support its growth. Goals have likely been somewhere in the front of your mind recently, as well. Businesses and organizations are planning for a new year, families are plotting out calendars, and new year's resolutions are a cliché in and of themselves. These are not bad things, but I'm not sure how often they hit upon the kind of growth that is truly satisfying. Last is our spiritual vision. I recently sat in on a Bible study led by teenagers who discussed the vast mystery of our faith and the struggle that it can be to grasp it. There's no doubt that they've hit upon a deep truth, but so many of us use the mystery as a cop-out, "Well, I'll never get it, so it's just not worth trying." What all of this says to me is that improving our vision is an uphill battle – we're going to need each other.

What if our goals, our plans, our hopes, and our resolutions were centered on reaching out to others who are bumping their knees on the corners of life? You see things in my life that I need to be aware of; reach out to me. You know someone who is lonely, maybe feeling lost in the dark; they could use your hand. You have neighbors, friends, and family who have been blessed with gifts and talents yet struggle to see their own worth; let them know that they are valuable. Maybe it's no surprise that Paul mentions looking into this "dark glass" in the very same chapter that he speaks so richly about love. It can be hard to show love, and just as hard to see it. But we all have a responsibility to one another.

I hope that your vision for life is ever improving. I'd love to hear about your adventures as you move through the world this year. Give me a call. In the meantime, have a very blessed and beautiful 2020. Now go reach out to someone who needs you.

– Ed Sutter





## FROM A DAUGHTER'S HEART

*In all your ways acknowledge him and he shall direct your path.*

—Proverbs 3:6

It's a brand New Year 2020!

It's a new year and a new decade which is amazing! With the start of a new year, we may have grand ideas and hopes about what we plan to accomplish and see come to fruition. Everyone's idea of this is different. Some may want to get healthier and exercise more, spend more time with family and friends, write a book, travel, organize and declutter your home, or grow in their spiritual journey.

We make a plan, set goals, and strive to make these plans a reality. This can be a struggle sometimes. We might start out strong with a definitive plan and then life happens and things don't go the way we expected. I have a plan or idea in my mind about what I think the outcome should be and then I am stopped in my tracks, surprised because it doesn't happen the way I expected.

I find myself needing to be reminded to pray and invite God into my plan or idea. So, I have this thought in my mind and I want to make it happen, but it doesn't happen right away or it doesn't turn out the way I thought it would. Perhaps, you have felt this struggle with how to deal with life's uncertain happenings. I might become disappointed or frustrated because I have to ask myself, am I really acknowledging and trusting God?

I know that God is still in control and he will guide me along the way. God knows what is best, and I just have to surrender to his purpose and plan.

January is an exceptionally meaningful month because seven years ago, during this month, I was waiting patiently on the birth of twins. I was scared and nervous and wondered what it would be like to go from a family of three to a family of five in an instant. I knew in my heart that God wouldn't give me and my husband more than we could handle, but at the same time I felt this was going to change our family. All the unknowns ran through my head. At that time, I had to ask God to be with me. After all, God knows us better than we know ourselves.

There are blessings in the midst of uncertainty. My husband Paul and children Noah, Annabeth, and William are the greatest blessings in my life. God knew the desire of my heart to have a loving and thoughtful husband and to be a mother.

I know in my heart I was being called to share God's love and minister to children, but I didn't know how and what that would look like. For years, I was serving and educating children in the public schools. Now a door has opened for me to serve and share my gifts here in the church. Again, a prayer that was answered but not how I expected. Initially, I felt like – Director of Children's & Family Ministry, I don't know if that is for me. But God did! He placed a desire for me to grow spiritually and share my love for him with you. If you have a dream in your heart that you desire, go for it. Ask God



to go along with you, giving every part of you to him and opening yourself up to the possibilities of being a gift to others.

I am persuaded by faith that the dream in one's heart *is rooted in God's plan for your life* to bless you with the desires of your heart.

*Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.*

—Psalm 37:4

It is my prayer that God will help us to know his will and give us the grace to cooperate with his plan.

My hope for 2020 is clarity and discernment in everything I do. How about you? Trust God's vision, for he sees what we don't see: the clarity of recognizing that God knows what is best for us.

*And we know that all things work together for good to those who love the Lord, and are called according to his purpose.*

—Romans 8:28

With God's love and mine,

Natalie

# Ten Commandments Workshop

*for children in third and fourth grade*

**Wednesdays, January 8–29**  
**6:00 – 8:00 p.m.**  
**Room 238**

Calling all third and fourth graders,

Have you ever thought about how Moses received the Ten Commandments? Come join us as we take a look back at the life of Moses and how God chose him to receive “His Ten Best.” We will be doing crafts, playing games, having snacks, and watching the DVD *The Ten Commandments*. We will also learn how to find the Ten Commandments in your Bibles and learn what each one means.

Have your parents email me at [egli@westminster-church.org](mailto:egli@westminster-church.org) to register you for the workshop.

Don't forget to bring your Bibles! See you on Wednesday, January 8!

Debb Egli



## ADULT SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

### Silence for our lives

P  
R  
I  
T

*“Where people have lived in inwardness the air is charged with blessing and does bless.”*

— May Sarton

*“Put yourself in a place where Grace can flow.”*

— Robert Lax



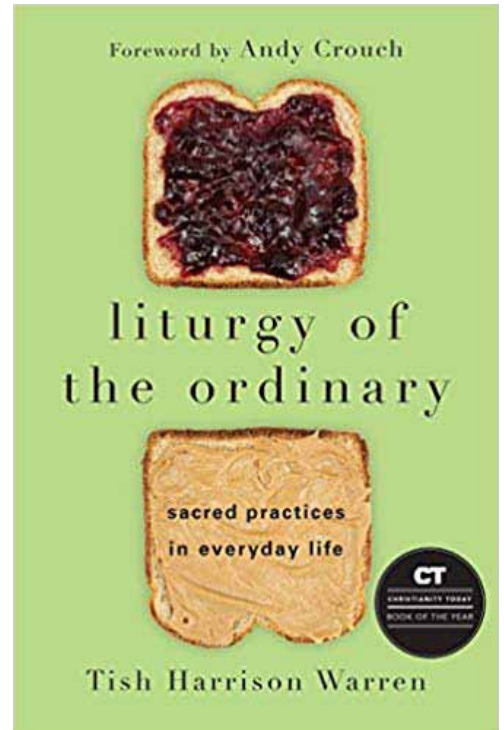
# Westminster Book Group

Wednesday, January 29  
Noon – 1:15 p.m.  
Yahweh Café

You are invited to bring a brown bag lunch and join us for the next meeting of the Westminster Book Group, when we will discuss *Liturgy of the Ordinary* by Tish Harrison Warren – *Christianity Today's* 2018 Book of the Year Winner, Spiritual Formation.

In the overlooked moments and routines of our day, we can become aware of God's presence in surprising ways. How do we embrace the sacred in the ordinary and the ordinary in the sacred? Framed around one ordinary day, this book explores daily life through the lens of liturgy, small practices, and habits that form us. Drawing from the diversity of her life as a campus minister, Anglican priest, friend, wife, and mother, Tish Harrison Warren opens up a practical theology of the everyday. Each activity is related to a spiritual practice as well as an aspect of our Sunday worship. Come and discover the holiness of your every day.

– Amazon



## We Are the Church... Let's Act Like It

*A New Women 2 Women Study*

Every other Tuesday, January 7 – March 31  
10:00 a.m.  
Memorial Parlor

The Book of Acts gives us a glimpse into the plan God has for the church. The early church was a place where everyone was welcome and accepted, even those who were often overlooked and rejected. Many people think the church of today has veered from that original design.

All women are invited to join in learning more about this book in the Bible. Our study guide will help us discover what the church can be in 2020. The author, Linda Tower Pevey, a Methodist minister, offers encouragement for the modern church to become truly transformative just as the early church was.

For more information and to receive a copy of the study guide, please contact Harriet Dilly or Sue Davis.



# Yoga4cancer

## *Empowering Cancer Patients Through Yoga*

There are many benefits that regular yoga practice can offer: improved flexibility, increased muscle strength, prevention of cartilage and joint breakdown, and increased bone health, among others. Yoga for cancer patients, however, offers a host of additional benefits, many of which empower patients to take back control of their lives.

Yoga4cancer (y4c) is a class offered to cancer patients and survivors through the Westminster Recreation & Outreach Center (WROC) and taught by Shawna Locke, a Yoga4cancer certified instructor.

“Yoga4cancer is an evidence-based methodology of constructing a yoga practice specifically for cancer patients and survivors, taking into account the physical, mental, and emotional tolls that surgeries and treatments take on the body and mind,” explained Shawna. Shawna has been a y4c instructor since 2018 after a series of intensive online and face-to-face trainings with Tari Prinster, the founder of y4c and a breast cancer survivor. Shawna was the second person in Pittsburgh to become certified, but since then, more have followed.

“Cancer and its treatments wreak havoc on the body and mind,” said Shawna. “The y4c methodology is conscious of that, and incorporates breathing exercises and movements to stimulate the immune system, rebuild bone density, improve strength and flexibility, and reduce anxiety.”

In addition to the physical benefits, the y4c classes offer a host of other benefits, including building a sense of community. “I’ve heard many of my class attendees discussing doctors, treatments, and side effects before and after class. In one of the first y4c classes that I taught, a woman brought a shoebox full of wigs to share with others who were currently going through chemotherapy,” recalled Shawna. “Witnessing the support and love they show for one another has been one of the most rewarding experiences I’ve had as a yoga teacher.”

Besides being able to witness such special moments, Shawna said the reason she decided to become a y4c certified instructor strikes a more personal chord. “My husband and I both lost our mothers to cancer about 20 years ago, when they were in their mid-40s. To honor them, we host a benefit every fall, the Locke American Cancer Society Benefit, which is now in its 18th year. I’d always wanted to do something more personal, working directly with cancer patients and survivors, and in 2012, I began a regular yoga practice to help work through depression and anxiety. A few years later, I toyed with the idea of becoming a yoga teacher to help those with cancer, but kept putting it off because I was sure I would be the oldest and most out-of-shape person in the training class. I was too self-conscious and fearful to take the leap.”

“In 2016, my best friend’s husband passed away from colon cancer. He was 45. On the day he died, I vowed that I would get



**Shawna Locke, Yoga4cancer certified instructor**

over my fears and apply to a teacher training program. I finished the requirements for my 200-hour certification on the one-year anniversary of his death.”

Shawna now regularly teaches in the fitness room at the WROC from 5:45 to 6:45 p.m. on Mondays and has recently added a Yin yoga class at 7:00 p.m. on the same day. The one-hour class begins in a seated position to allow everyone to settle in and focus on their breath. After some warm-up movements, she then transitions to hands and knees, and then mindfully continues to standing, all the while continuing to link movement with breath.

“The last segment of the class is more restorative, a time to wind down and relax,” noted Shawna. “It’s definitely not the same class every time. For those who attend regularly, they build on what they’ve learned previously, which provides variability and more of a challenge. Throughout class, I give options and alternatives to the poses so that everyone can find what works best for their bodies.”

– Heather Holtschlag

*Reprinted with permission, USC Today Magazine, Winter 2019.*

## Yoga4cancer

**January 13 – March 2**

**Mondays, 5:45 – 6:45 p.m.**

**WROC Fitness Room (above the gym)**

**Cost: \$5; registration required.**

*For more information about the y4c classes and all of our Winter 2020 fitness classes, visit the website at [wroc.westminster-church.org](http://wroc.westminster-church.org) or contact WROC director Kathy Long at 412-835-6630x200.*



# The Westminster Gifting Tree: A Tradition of Giving

## The History of the Gifting Tree

In February of 2011, Westminster received a request from a church member, who worked for the Bair Foundation at the time, for five pairs of jeans. A family of five children living in extreme poverty with their elderly grandparents needed clothing. Could we help?

The request for these jeans reached the Outreach Commission and it planted a seed. At the time, the Outreach Commission had no organized platform to collect and distribute specific items from our congregation. We knew we had people in our church family who would donate items, but what was the most effective way to do this? We didn't need 50 pairs of donated jeans, just five. As a result, the Outreach team set out to design a process to communicate requests and collect and distribute specific items within the church. From this small request for five pairs of jeans, the Westminster Gifting Tree was born.

## Our Partnership with the Bair Foundation

Through the years, the Gifting Tree has been used to collect items for different organizations. Our most notable effort is our annual Christmas gift drive for the Bair Foundation. The Bair Foundation is a Christian based social services ministry with a local office in the Pittsburgh area that serves vulnerable children and families in our region. Our relationship continues to evolve into 2020 as we look for the best way to serve these children and families going forward.

## Our Christmas Gift Drive

Our first year, we had about 50 gift requests. This year, we served 275 children and families. We support babies through teenagers and help struggling kinship families. We are proud to report that every child given to us from Bair has received at least one gift from our project.

**Our "gifters":** This project requires many types of Westminster "gifters"— some prefer to donate gift cards, others will buy clothing or toys or computers. The teenagers living in group homes appeal to some, babies touch the heart of others. Funders give monetary donations to help us provide gifts for those children whose tags are not taken. Each type of giving is needed and appreciated and that's what makes this project so successful.

**Our team:** Our Westminster Bair team is comprised of people who have a heart to help children and honor God. We utilize various skills to accomplish our mission. Some are great with spreadsheets and can organize data. Three sisters utilize the talent of coordination and cooperation to help organize volunteers. Our "sorting elves" volunteers help to inventory all the incoming gifts and determine if a child's needs have been met. Shoppers use our Bair fund

to help us get last minute missing gifts. Our team works well because we use different skills to complete a goal we all believe in, with the teaching of Jesus guiding us along the way.

## Our impact

In the end, a child receives the blessing of a gift. The case workers tell us stories of the impact these gifts have made. Through this project, the case worker can also build trust from these gift offerings to kids who think no one cares. Internally, our Westminster team supports the needs of children who live in situations often very different from our own. And our congregation is given a direct path to bless a local child or family in need.

## Our Next Steps

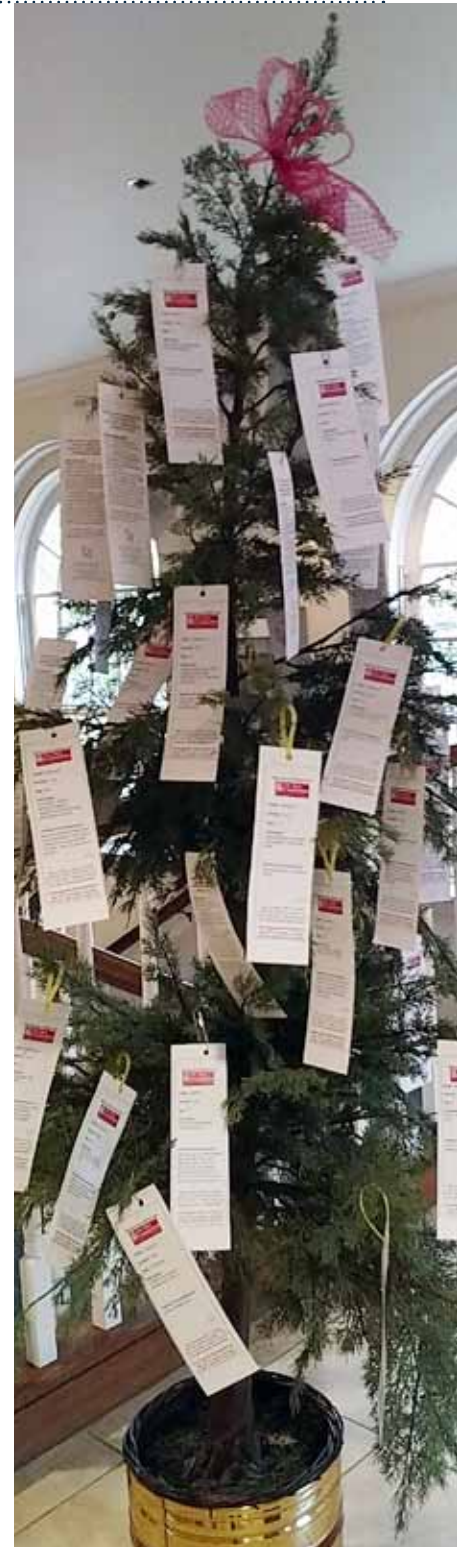
We are reminded of the idea of giving "your time, talent, and treasures" to the church to honor God and spread his word while doing kindness in the world. The Outreach Commission aims to find partners that help people both near and far, through monetary and material donations as well as through volunteer opportunities. We are working hard in 2020 to continue this mission.

In regard to Bair, we want to refresh and improve our Bair partnership. With funding from our successful Christmas Eve offering and with Outreach's support, we would like to redesign our process to make it easier to support Bair with their ongoing needs year-round as well as through our annual Christmas project.

If you would like to be involved in the planning team or serve as a resource who could participate as time allows, please send us an email at [giftingtree@westminster-church.org](mailto:giftingtree@westminster-church.org) or contact Jan Baumann at the church to be put on our contact list. We hope to begin discussions soon.

Thank you to all who have supported our Gifting Tree Project and the Bair Foundation. Your generosity is truly appreciated.

— Becky Weber





# Health, Despair, and Mortality

We've only just begun. That was once a hopeful refrain. But now, it applies to a worrisome trend. Working age people in the U.S. are dying at rates that are unprecedented among wealthy countries. This finding comes from a stunning, comprehensive study of a reversal in U.S. life expectancy. Because it's now in its third year, it's more than just a blip. Steven Woolf and Heidi Schoomaker published their analysis recently in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Health, despair, and mortality seem locked together in a trend that's harming us all.

## The Link to Obesity

Back in 2005, Jay Olshansky foresaw this. He and colleagues wrote in the *New England Journal of Medicine*:

Unless effective population-level interventions to reduce obesity are developed, the steady rise in life expectancy observed in the modern era may soon come to an end and the youth of today may, on average, live less healthy and possibly even shorter lives than their parents.

In fact, that's exactly what's happening now. And Olshansky says this is only the beginning:

Kids are acquiring obesity in their early teen years, sometimes under the age of 10. When they get up into their 20s, 30s, and 40s, they're carrying the risk factors of obesity that were acquired when they were children. We didn't see that in previous generations.

This isn't a one-time phenomenon. It's going to echo through time.

## Disparities and Despair

Anne Case and Angus Deaton have woven a compelling narrative about "deaths of despair" to describe some of these trends. Suicide and drug overdoses are big contributors. However, to fully explain how people are dying in mid-life, you have to look further. Improvements in cardiovascular death rates have stopped and reversed. That's big. Deaths linked to diabetes are rising, too.

In parallel with all of these trends is the fact of rising disparities. Economic disparities yield disparities in health and mortality. A loss of relative social status seems to be playing a role, too.

## More of Same Will Not Work

In an editorial alongside this new research in *JAMA*, Howard Koh, Anand Parekh, and John Park call for action. Their call for more of same on some policies is not terribly impressive. It's boilerplate that hasn't yielded any results to date. Preaching about healthy eating has flourished while obesity has risen and life expectancy has taken a dive.

But what does impress is their call for curiosity. We must come to terms with the effect of income inequality, unstable employment, public policy, and social dimensions on health and mortality. Healthy food is great, but only if it matches up with healthy prospects for life and well-being. And that is simply not going to happen on a wage of \$7.25 an hour.

As Christ calls us to serve the poor and sick (Matthew 25:35-45), we cannot sit on our hands while this trend becomes steadily worse. We can act on our faith. This is why Westminster has an active Peace and Justice ministry. Please bring your gifts to this important effort.

– Ted Kyle

*Ted is a Westminster member, elder, pharmacist, and advocate for sound health policy.*



**Death and the Miser, painting by Hieronymus Bosch, public domain image from the National Gallery of Art, U.S.**

# Baptism of the Lord and the New Year

Each year on the second Sunday of January we remember the baptism of Jesus. This year's lectionary text tells the story from Matthew 3:13-17:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw

the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

It's a beautiful story of Jesus on earth, blessed at his baptism by the presence of the Holy Spirit and by his father in heaven. Jesus, like all of his followers, needed to be baptized to fulfill God's plan. As we ponder our Lord's baptism on January 12, each of us can remember our own baptism as a way to renew our faith as we move through another year of hope, challenges, and gifts from God.

*God of all righteousness, we need the life and grace that you alone can give. Open the heavens to us and pour out your Holy Spirit so that we may live as your beloved children; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.*

— Presbyterian Mission Agency



# Baptisms

September 15, 2019

Blaire Michelle Bowser  
Parents: Kara & Aaron Bowser

Charles Robert Zuzak III  
Parents: Katharine & Charles Zuzak

November 10, 2019

Mavis Rose Bupka  
Parents: Jacklyn Stoughton & Jarrod Bupka

Theodore Graham Stevens  
Parents: Jodee & Graham Stevens

Aiden Bernard Stutzman  
Parents: Jessica & Andrew Stutzman

# Deaths

**Laura Brown**  
*December 2*

**Alan “L. J.” Dreeland**  
*December 4*



# Financial Report

*As of November 30, 2019*

## General Fund Contributions

Year-to-Date Actual 2019	\$1,517,901.30
Annual Budget	\$1,586,140.00
Amount needed to fulfill budget	\$(68,238.70)

## Year-to-Date Income Statement

Income	\$1,855,271.46
Expenses	\$1,877,758.41
Net Position	\$(22,486.95)

We thank you for your wonderful support through the first eleven months, and we are pleased to report that we have not had to rely on any outside lending sources to fulfill our internal and external commitments.

If you are current or ahead on your 2019 pledge, thank you for your continuing support. If you are behind on your 2019 pledge, please consider catching up and fulfilling your pledge, so that we can continue to meet our commitments. Thank you.

# 2020 Stewardship Campaign Update

*As of December 12, 2019*

	2020	2019	Net Position
Number of pledges received	329	418	(89)
Amount pledged	\$1,324,846.18	\$1,477,975.68	\$(153,129.50)

The 2020 Stewardship campaign is underway, and we thank you for your pledge. We have received pledges for 2020 from about 73% of those who pledged for 2019.

If you have yet to make your 2020 pledge, you may do so by placing it in the offering plate today, or by mailing it to the Finance Office at the church, or by going online at [www.westminster-church.org/give](http://www.westminster-church.org/give). The 2020 Stewardship campaign pledge cards are available in the pew racks and in the brochure racks around the church. Thank you.



---

# What Is Per Capita?

The official definition of per capita is “an opportunity for all communicant members of the Presbyterian church through the governing bodies to participate equally, responsibly, and interdependently by sharing the cost of coordination and evaluation of mission; and of performing ecclesiastical, legislative, and judicial functions that identify a Reformed Church, while at the same time strengthening the sense of community among all Presbyterians” (GA Minutes, Part I, 1995).

In other words, per capita is a set amount of money (apportionment) per member that congregations pay to the larger Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Another way to look at it is that per capita is a Presbyterian Covenant Community Fund – part of the glue that holds Presbyterians together. Because every Presbyterian shares in the benefit of the PC(USA)’s system of government, the expenses associated with coordinating and performing the functions of that system are shared by everyone as well.

Please remember to forward your 2020 per capita apportionment to the Finance Office anytime after January 1, 2020. **The amount set by Pittsburgh Presbytery for 2019 is \$34.79 per member.** Each year Westminster must send the amount set for the year to the presbytery **for each active member of our church.** For those members who do not send in their per capita apportionment, we must make up the difference from our operating budget. For those of you receiving offering envelopes, there is an envelope inside each box for the per capita apportionment. For those of you who have elected not to receive offering envelopes, please note “2020 Per Capita” on the memo line of your check. If you have any questions regarding this apportionment, please contact Cindy Bingham, church business administrator at 412-835-6630x201. **Thank you.**



## Church Closing Policy

In the event of severe weather, Westminster Presbyterian Church, Westminster Nursery School and Kindergarten (WNSK), and Westminster Recreation & Outreach Center (WROC) will follow the schedule of the Upper St. Clair School District.

- When the school district is closed, all activities, classes, and meetings scheduled for that day are canceled.
- In cases of delays, all meetings, activities, and classes will take place at their scheduled time, unless otherwise determined by the facilitator or instructor. Westminster Nursery School will operate on its modified schedule.

Westminster Child Development Center will make its own determination on closings, cancellations, and delays.

Closing information is broadcast on television (KDKA, WTAE, and WPXI), radio (KDKA-AM 1020), and the Internet ([www.westminster-church.org](http://www.westminster-church.org), [wroc.westminster-church.org](http://wroc.westminster-church.org), [pittsburgh.cbslocal.com](http://pittsburgh.cbslocal.com), [www.wtae.com](http://www.wtae.com), and [www.wpxi.com](http://www.wpxi.com).)



## WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

2040 Washington Road  
Pittsburgh, PA 15241  
[www.westminster-church.org](http://www.westminster-church.org)  
A PC(USA) Congregation

NON-PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
PITTSBURGH, PA  
PERMIT 2748

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED  
DATED MATERIAL — PLEASE DELIVER PROMPTLY

This *Spire* was printed on paper that contains 30% recycled post-consumer fiber, is EcoLogo certified, and was manufactured in Canada using biogas.

Thank you for helping to care for God's creation by recycling this *Spire*.



[www.facebook.com/Westminster.Pittsburgh](http://www.facebook.com/Westminster.Pittsburgh)



[www.youtube.com/user/WestminsterUSC](http://www.youtube.com/user/WestminsterUSC)

**“We should ask God to increase our hope when it is small, awaken it when it is dormant, confirm it when it is wavering, strengthen it when it is weak, and raise it up when it is overthrown.”**

– John Calvin

