

FALL 2023

# THE SPIRE



A publication of  
**WESTMINSTER**  
PRESBYTERIAN  
**CHURCH**

# + Belonging

Being together



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**CHURCH STAFF** 412-835-6630

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DENISE BURKE, *Executive Director*

NURSERY SCHOOL 412-835-2906  
 CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER 412-835-9450

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

**Belonging**  
 Being together



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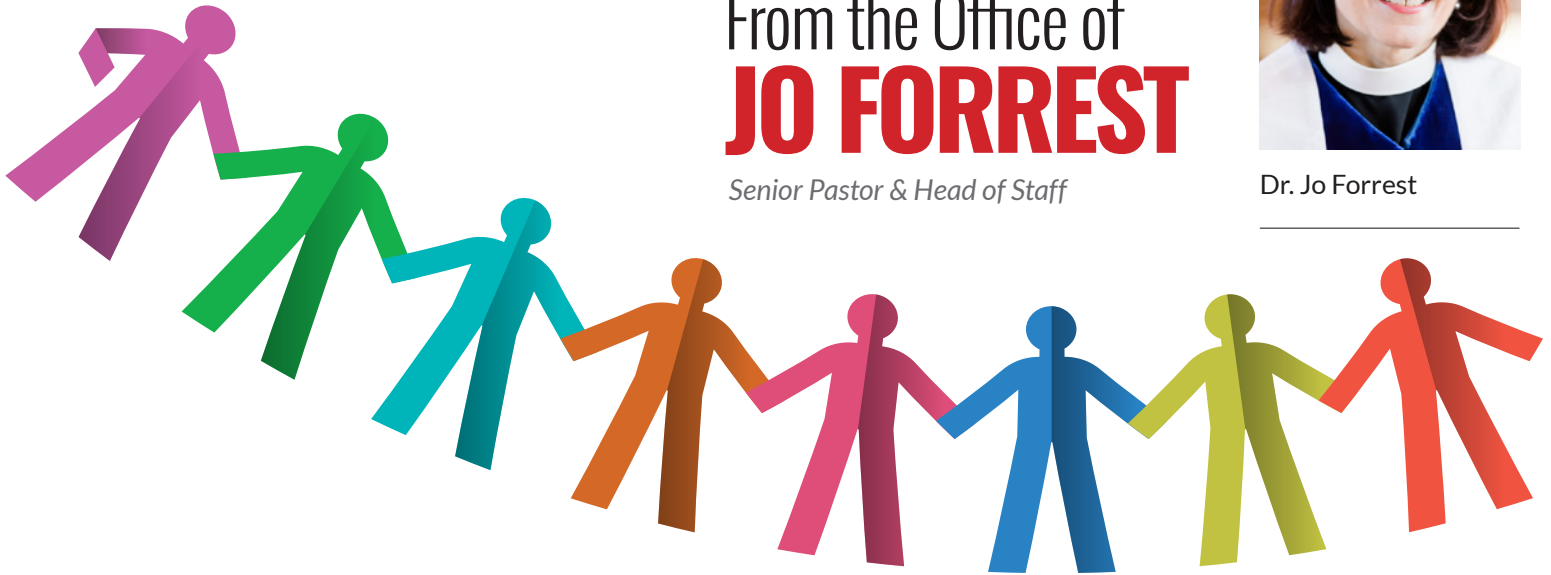
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Senior Pastor & Head of Staff



Dr. Jo Forrest

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*He drew a circle that shut me out.  
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.  
But love and I had the wit to win:  
We drew a circle and took him in.*

—Edwin Markham

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**M**y third-grade teacher taught everyone in my class how to make a string of paper dolls. We cut and cut until everyone unfurled the paper, so the dolls appeared to hold hands. The teacher thumbtacked them at the perimeter of the bulletin board and placed individual dolls within the interior. She told us we needed to keep the circle open.

Then she put letters one word at a time in the center, teaching us a very adultish poem beginning with: “He drew a circle that shut me out.”

She asked, “Have you ever felt excluded?” Oh, many hands shot up with stories. We could not name or blame, just share how we felt.

The next line had a big word: “Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.” If I ever use the word *flout* I still think of this poem.

She asked us to wonder if hurting another person helps us heal?

We lingered over the next line, “But love and I had the wit to win.” We imagined all of the ways wit and love create a winning combination.

The last line stitched this poem in my heart: “We drew a circle that took him in.”

This fall, we will explore all the ways we **belong** to God through Jesus and this church. We will draw circles with love, to invite and hold. Come be a part of it. ■





# Belonging (in Small Groups)

By Megan Exley  
Adult Spiritual Development Commission

**B**rené Brown, author and researcher, says the path to true belonging is through vulnerability. Westminster has been blessed to see the path of vulnerability and belonging forged through small groups.

From *Faith Transitions* (discussion group for former Catholics and other denominations): "The June meetings were so helpful that I can't help but think that others would also benefit." – *Cathy*

From *The Artist's Way* (a practical approach to exploring one's personal creativity and spiritual connection with God): "The Artist's Way helped me to rediscover my inner child and to identify the people and thoughts that stand in the way of my creativity. Sharing with others in the group provided new insights about ourselves and cemented many new friendships. At the conclusion I was able to set realistic goals for nurturing my creativity." – *Roberta*

From Kristy Berrott, the facilitator of a small group for the study *Hope: A User's Manual*: "It was a safe and comfortable space to challenge our interpretations of the text while also encouraging one another within its daily applications. Through its success, the group has decided to continue our meetings for the fall. We will be studying the book and podcast *Universal Christ* by Richard Rohr beginning September 14. Please know that we would love to have you join us. I wish nothing more than for each group member to develop a real sense of belonging at Westminster Church just as I was gifted this summer."

If you're ready to deepen your sense of belonging at Westminster, there is a small group waiting to welcome you with open arms. ■

# Storytelling as Community

By Becky Boyer  
Director of Youth Ministry



The Veritas youth group visits Randyland on the North Side.

“The bottom line is that we all long to connect ... Our sense of self is a communal construct ... We are created for community. Without community, we struggle. It’s as if we didn’t have oxygen to breathe.”

—Parker Palmer

I’ve been reading an outstanding book called *Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World* by Vivek Murthy, MD, Surgeon General of the United States.

If there is one thing that COVID taught us, it is about human connection, or lack of. We need connection from the day we are born until the day we die. Babies need to have eye contact and human touch for healthy development. We also know that older people find a gentle touch and a familiar song or story to be soothing. We need to connect with others.

In his book, Murthy talks about the importance of stories and the role that “storytelling plays in securing human values, purpose, and identity and in bonding us emotionally.” The Bible is a perfect example of the stories of God’s people and their struggles to connect with God. How would we know about God had the people of Israel not told their story?

I have met so many interesting people in my first year at Westminster who have great stories to tell. I yearn for connection between these wise people and the teens of our church community. I welcome people of all generations to tell their faith stories and how God has been present in their lives. We need to tell each other our stories, our ancestor’s stories, and God’s story.

In Veritas this fall, we will explore belonging and what it means to be a part of the community of God. It is my hope for their church community to teach them about how they are loved and worthy in the eyes of God. ■

# TOP 10 TEN Reasons Why Being a Volunteer Is SO MUCH FUN!

*By Ed Sutter*

*Senior Director of Christian Education*

Just a few weeks ago, Westminster's Children, Family, and Youth Ministries hosted a training opportunity for anyone interested in volunteering during the coming year. As part of our time together we invited a few of our veteran volunteers to share their experience. One such veteran, David Kerr, shared his thoughts through a Top Ten List.

- 1** You get to sleep in comfortable beds in five-star resorts and visit destinations with water slides, noise, and enough humidity to make even my hair curl.
- 2** You might get an opportunity to break your finger. Even when it's the first time you are left alone with the group and you were specifically told not to let anyone get hurt.
- 3** You get to throw balls at kids with names like Fluffy and Wee Paul and Peanut.
- 4** You will learn how to get around this church even in the pitch black.
- 5** You get to make a fool out of yourself with no consequences.
- 6** You might get the chance to work a few 10 to 12-hour days in the hot sun doing construction work.
- 7** You will gain a more positive perspective on the future of this world from hanging around these kids.
- 8** You will get to build relationships outside the walls of this church that can last much longer than the years the kids are in Veritas. You will learn as much from them as they will from you.
- 9** You will feel the love that oozes from this group.
- 10** You might get a chance to hang out with Uncle Dave.
- 11 BONUS** You get to meet cool adults and build relationships with them, too.

If your interest is piqued, or even if you're just curious about this "Uncle Dave" guy, we'd love for you to join in support of our ministries to young people. We have opportunities ranging from Prayer Team to Games Leader and everything in between. All that we do—through humor, fun, prayer, or worship—is in the hopes that we might point the next generation to become disciples of Jesus. We hope you'll join us. ■

## VOLUNTEER TODAY!

# Ban These Words in Church

By Rev. Ann Morris  
Parish Associate

**T**he church is a community formed by the Word, say the opening words of John's Gospel. God's Word and Jesus' words reveal not only who God is, but who and whose we are.

The words that we use to speak and write to one another should receive thoughtful selection. Peter Marty, editor of *The Christian Century*, suggests in September's issue several words and phrases that belie the sense of belonging that is vital to a faith community. Among the words that Marty would ban use in church are *visitor*, *family*, and the phrase "join us."

Use guests, not visitors. Fans of the visiting high school football team sit in a small set of bleachers away from

the cheering home team fans. In most settings, visitors don't enjoy the full set of privileges or responsibilities as members do.

You can sing "We are fam-i-ly" in the company of Pirate fans, but don't refer to Westminster as a family. Peter Marty explains, "Families are closed social units.... [F]amilies have scores of customs and conventions that aren't always obvious or welcoming to newcomers." Jesus taught his disciples that following him would call them into a life larger than their families.

Instead of "Join us for," Marty suggests that we try a more open invitation for all to "Join in" an activity. "Join us" cultivates a feeling of clubbiness.

Christian community isn't the same as community defined by our culture, so we need to be careful not to borrow vocabulary from our culture that can misrepresent what Christian community is all about. Culture values selection and elitism. Christianity welcomes us all, just as we are. Belonging is not something that we bestow upon "visitors" who present themselves for membership. Christian community envisions the forever realm of God into which Jesus ushers us all. ■



## Belonging by Making Music

By Christine Hestwood  
Director of Music

*"That first breath that a choir or orchestra takes together, a breath filled with focus, intention, and emotion, a breath unified for no other reason than to make something beautiful together ... that is the reason we do what we do."*

—Eric Whitacre

**A**s you probably know, music permeates most aspects of my life. Some of my fondest memories are when I am making music with others. There's power in the act of coming together to create music. There's even more power when the music is divinely inspired to honor and glorify God.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs lists belonging as one of the major needs that motivate human behavior. The needs for love and belonging lie at the center of his pyramid as part of social needs. I'm writing to welcome all of you and your family members to think about belonging to one of Westminster's musical groups. You don't need to consider yourself a good singer or bell ringer. There are no auditions, and you never need to sing alone (unless you want to!).

The Chancel Choir sings an anthem with the following lyrics: "We are many parts. We are all one body. And the gifts we have we are given to share. May the spirit of love make us one indeed."

If you don't feel that music is your thing, join in a Bible study, a WROC class, Wednesday night dinners, etc. Become a deeper part of Westminster, where there's so much more than Sunday morning worship! Share your gifts, and receive the same in return. ■





**By Faith Kemmler**  
*Director of Children's & Family Ministry*

Recently at Kids' Connection, we learned about how we are made in the image of God, how we can see God in others, and how we all belong to God's family. One of the kids stopped me and asked, "Where do we see God?" As adults, we often forget that the abstract language we use doesn't always translate well for young children who are still concrete thinkers. I explained to the group that grownups forget their words can be confusing, and when we talk about seeing God, we really mean feeling God. So how do we see or feel God in ourselves and in others? And how do we remind ourselves that through God's love, we all have a place we belong in God's family.

We start by knowing that we are first and foremost loved by God. In God's perfect love, our perceived flaws and failures don't prevent us from belonging to or being loved by our Creator. And we commit to doing our best to share God's love with those around us. Ephesians 4 gives instructions for unity in Christian life together, ending with "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (vs. 32). As we live in God's love and share kindness with others, we should embrace our true selves, living freely as God created us.



An abundance of *Be Loved. Be Kind. Be You.* tags for the taking.

But still, how do we see or feel God? When we live in love, sharing kindness, and embracing our true selves, how does it feel? Does it feel free? Or safe? Warm? Comfortable? Joyful? It feels like belonging to God.

**Be loved. Be kind. Be you. Be God's beloved child. ■**





Skip Carson, now, and at age 12, 1947, in his parents living room for Youth Fellowship.

# We Belong to One Body

*So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.*

Romans 12:5-6

**By Skip Carson**  
*Longtime Member and Volunteer*

**W**estminster has been an important part of my life since I was 12 years old.

As a charter member, and part of a charter family, volunteering was something important to my family. IT MADE SENSE.

I remember fondly my mother and dad, sitting in our living room, discussing the vision of a new church in Upper St. Clair with our founding pastor, John Galbreath.

As we look at the church building today, it is beautiful and functional, but it is the staff and volunteers that make this church vibrant.

A quote I remember from John Galbreath is “Find a need? Fill it!” The first need I remember filling was when I was almost 12 and we were attending a very early service at the Clifton School. An usher was needed; I volunteered and continued ushering for over 70 years.

Through the years our family has found numerous other rewarding ways to be involved. My mother taught Sunday school, helped to found the Women’s Federation, etc. And Westminster participated in sponsoring a Hungarian refugee family, which became a continuing friendship, especially through my sister.

It has always been a blessing to be surrounded by people with common visions for the church as we worked together as ushers, Sunday school teachers, 25th and 50th anniversary teams, deacons, and – most recently – the Thursday Gang, our congenial in-house maintenance team that is very beneficial to Westminster.

How could I ever imagine how fast 77 years would pass? I do know that volunteering at Westminster has been rewarding and fulfilling beyond my imagination. ■

## VOLUNTEER

There are opportunities for everyone to belong to the body, to be a part of this church family. If you would like to learn more about how to connect, contact Jan Baumann by email, [baumann@westminster-church.org](mailto:baumann@westminster-church.org), or call/text 412-559-1034. God has a plan for your life.



*By Denise Burke  
WECEP Executive Director*

# A Legacy OF BELONGING

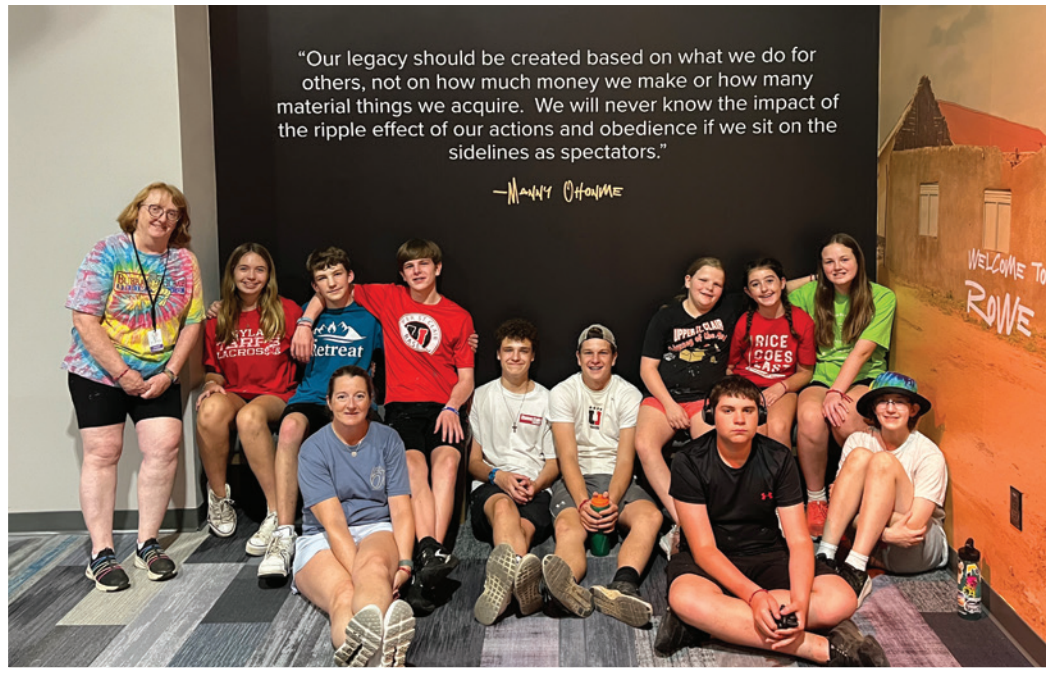
**W**estminster Nursery School opened its doors in the fall of 1958 when Westminster Presbyterian Church recognized the need for a community preschool. The program grew in January of 1983 when the Child Development Center opened. Today both programs make up what is known as Westminster Early Childhood Education Program (WECEP). At WECEP we see each student and his/her family as an important part of the Westminster legacy.

A parent of an alumni from 1995 recently shared her family's experience at WECEP with me. The family had moved to Pittsburgh in June and were searching for the right place for their youngest son who had missed the cutoff for kindergarten in the public school. They enrolled him in the T class at WECEP, and he had a wonderful year that gave him a real sense of belonging. This was so important because everything was new to the family: church, home, work, etc. The mother believes that the community at WECEP laid a strong foundation for making the step to public school easier for her son.

WECEP's mission is to create and maintain an educational community which provides the highest quality early childhood learning experiences in a safe, nurturing, and creative environment that is based on a Christian foundation.

We welcome you and your family to work together with us to help build a strong future for the children and families of our community. ■





Youth group on a field trip to Rowe Park.

# ACCEPTANCE and BELONGING for Youth at Westminster

By *Jerry Malarkey*, Elder  
Youth Commission

The best words to describe the current energy in the Youth Ministry are vibrant, exciting, serving, and high impact.

The youth recently completed a mission trip to urban Charlotte, NC, where they performed a variety of tasks to benefit various parts of the community.

In addition, the Social Justice League has been meeting to discuss topics such as diversity, inclusion, and fairness. They recently traveled to the Hot Metal Bridge Church to prepare and serve meals to people experiencing food shortage.

Veritas and JAM both resumed in late August and the Youth Wing is again filled with faithful excitement and enthusiasm.

The energy that radiates from these activities is contagious. The Youth Ministry at Westminster is open and welcoming to all.

The Youth Commission is planning the second round of the Teen and Parent Mental Health Speaker Series. The first series of speakers dealt with a range of topics including dealing with stress and expectations, understanding and welcoming the LGBTQ community, depression and suicide. Attendees included both






The Social Justice League

members of the Westminster congregation as well as members of the surrounding community. The discussions that resulted from these speakers provided a safe, welcoming environment for difficult conversations.

Our Youth Ministry leaders have created an environment of acceptance and belonging where our young people can be free and feel safe to be themselves in an encouraging and non-judgmental atmosphere. ■



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## FINDING MY WAY

Having attended Westminster Church for the past year, the beauty of the labyrinth and the significance captured me. I had to paint it! It proved to be a difficult task and required some creative photography,



piecing the pictures together to get the image. The finished watercolor is not perfect but "feels" like the beautiful red and tan pavers. Such a perfect place to walk and think and pray for direction. I have found my way at Westminster from the kindness of the people and the openness of search.

—Toni Jo Kidd

Painting Title: *The Labyrinth*  
Artist: Toni Jo Kidd  
Media: Watercolor, pen and ink

## SAVE *the* DATES

**Teen & Parent  
Mental Health**  
September 27

**World Communion  
Sunday**  
October 1

**Fall Festival**  
October 15

**Congregational  
Meeting**  
October 29