

LENT 2023

THE SPIRE



A publication of
WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH



Seeking

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Cover artwork:
Wet Stones
 By Carmelle Beaugelin

Conté crayon,
 charcoal, acrylic,
 gold gild on paper



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By T. Denise Anderson
Inspired by John 9: 1-7
Oil on canvas

From the Office of **JO FORREST**

Senior Pastor & Head of Staff



Dr. Jo Forrest

Early in my sales training at IBM, one of my coaches told stories of his two-year and nine-year old sons' nagging questions. The younger child tested his patience asking about what seemed obvious and boggled his mind with curiosities humans have yet to solve. His older son pestered him to understand why he couldn't stay up late to watch the hockey game. This sales coach insisted that if we mustered the sense of wonder and relentlessness of kids, we'd be successful.

Parents might shudder at the barrage of questions from kids while I imagine God welcomes them.

When we are honest, the questions we ask shape our lives—both from the answers and the silence we receive.

Let's reclaim that fresh skepticism and persist in seeking answers.

This Lent join us at Westminster as we seek to draw closer to God. Ask questions of why and how. Seek to be filled and guided. Persist.

We grow stronger as we wrestle with questions unique for our time and place within the shelter of our firm, Christian foundation.

This Lent, our sermon series, the devotionals for children and adults, the social media posts, hymns we will sing, poetry we will read, and art we study were inspired by the questions people asked of Jesus. Many of the resources come from *A Sanctified Art*, a team of artists in ministry, whose work inspired the imagination of the entire staff at Westminster.

Bring your questions, God is ready to listen. ■

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Confirmation Class Yields a Message of Hope

By **Becky Boyer**

Associate Director of Youth Ministry

If you were asked to write a Statement of Faith at this time of your life, what would you say? I don't know about you, but I think mine would be a lot different than it was in ninth grade. The only part of Confirmation Class I remember was the pastor's son challenging his father with questions. We were all in shock that he was allowed to ask these questions, some of which we never even thought of. (He was smart.)

What do we expect a teenager to know at this stage of life? How can we expect to teach them everything about God, Jesus, the Trinity, history of the Reformation, the Bible (who wrote it, how were the stories passed down, how to navigate it, etc.), the Sacraments of Communion and Baptism, the Book of Order, the Confessions, how to pray – all in a 12-week period of time. After all that, we ask them to write a Statement of their Faith to present to Session. I don't know about you, but my head would be spinning!

Many think that Confirmation is the final step to becoming an "adult member" of the church.

Just like baptizing a child, when they become a teenager, they go through Confirmation. Then what? Are they done now? Is the work finished? Do they know all the answers? Of course, not!

This is the beginning. Up until this point we have been nurturing the seeds in good soil and water. Now is the time for growth – their faith journey is just starting. In class we talked about the fact that their faith will be tested. There will be times of doubt and times when they will wonder if God is listening. But there will be times of joy and celebration as well.

Many of our students wrote about how they have grown up in the church and participated in various programs which nurtured their faith in God. They also shared they felt Westminster to be a safe place where they feel loved and are allowed to ask questions. Good job, Westminster! All who volunteer with our children and youth are fulfilling the baptismal promise well. Keep it up!

Many are worried about the future of Christianity and our churches. These teens are our hope that we will carry the Word of God into the next generation and on. I see hope in these young people that they will share and be God's love wherever they go in the world. ■



Thoughts expressed by some of our Confirmands ...

"I came to realize that God made me in his image and that I have a purpose. I also came to realize that being a Christian is more than just going to church on Wednesdays and Sundays."

"I want to make a promise to the church that I will:

Continue to learn.

Continue to search.

Lean on trusted friends and family for knowledge and advice.

Turn to church leaders for guidance.

Live for love."

"I think that my purpose is to live a life that God would be proud of. I think that my purpose is to live a happy, full life, learning from my mistakes and trying to help spread kindness and light. I want to become a member of Westminster Presbyterian Church to continue my faith journey and to keep learning more about myself. I also want to be able to show people that there is a place and community found in the Church that is hard to replicate anywhere else. I want everyone to be able to feel like they are loved and safe in a Church atmosphere."

"I know my relationship with God will just keep growing and growing, and I'm excited to keep getting closer with him in the future. Being completely honest, I don't fully understand the Holy Trinity, but I know it will take time to learn..."

"This church is a safe space to talk about any questions I have, and I know it will help me build my relationship with God even more."



Can I ask you a question...?

By Faith Kemmler

Director of Children's & Family Ministry

Why do we ask questions? Where do our questions lead us? More questions? Concrete answers? Do we even take the time to ask questions?

How can asking questions help us grow?

At JAM, we ask a lot of questions. So many that I used to become frustrated at how often we would “derail” from the lesson. After a few weeks of frustration, it finally clicked. Oh, they’re not asking all of these questions to annoy me; they’re seeking a better understanding of who God is and what that means for them.

Is the Bible true? Is God male? Who created God? Why did Jesus go to hell? Does God love my friends who aren't Christians? Is it okay to be angry at God?

Every question led to another question. We discussed how some questions have specific answers while others may always leave us wondering. I was amazed as I watched these fifth and sixth graders come to realize that developing our faith is not always about answers. It’s about seeking, wondering, and questioning. When we open the Bible to learn about who God is, we open up to a world of wonder.

Questioning is vulnerable. We have to be willing to look in the mirror. We have to be open to hearing the Holy Spirit and knowing we may not always hear what we want to hear. As you read scripture, and as you seek to know God, what questions are you asking? What are you learning about yourself? How is the Holy Spirit shaping you? What are you learning about God? And how can you share your questions with others? ■

Devotions for Lent

By *Barbara Marsh*
Adult Spiritual
Development Commission

Lent is a time for reflection as we think about and prepare for the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. A Lenten devotional – *Seeking: Honest Questions for Deeper Faith* – asks us to consider a different question for each week of Lent. For instance, the first week’s question is “Who do you listen to?” Then, through familiar Bible stories such as Jesus’ temptation by Satan in the wilderness and an Old Testament story of Adam and Eve deciding to disobey God, the authors explore how those stories might be relevant to us in today’s world. They ask us to look inside ourselves and experience the places where decisions might pull us in different directions.

The authors and illustrators of this devotional, created by *A Sanctified Art*, use multiple ways to engage us as we ponder the meaning of scripture for our own journey of faith. They follow some stories through Jesus’ journey during his ministry, his crucifixion, and his resurrection, asking us what those stories teach us as we live our daily lives and as we focus on the passion of Christ during Lent.

During Lent, this devotional will be helpful to us. And the sermon series, worship music, children’s devotional, and small group discussions will also provide opportunities for us to hear and reflect on God’s sacrificial love for us and God’s call for our response. May your participation enrich you. ■



Scan the QR code with
your smart phone

The devotional “seeking” is available through the following link, <https://online.flippingbook.com/view/928029194> or by scanning the QR code.

Artwork
Why have you forsaken me?
By Lauren Wright Pittman
Inspired by Matthew 27:27-50
Digital painting

Why have you forsaken me?

ARTIST COMMENT

This image represents the deep lament of God. It holds the desperation of a parent and the betrayal of a loved one. These acts of abuse, cruelty, and indignity were fired at the Creator of the Universe by the very beings into whom God breathed life. Perhaps God is crying out to us, "Why have you forsaken me?"



Seeking: A Lenten Devotional Group Conversation

Mondays, February 27—April 3, 10:00-11:00 a.m. in Room 231

Led by Barb Myers

Tuesdays, February 28—April 4, 6:30-7:30 p.m. in Room 231

Led by Cricket Ruppert and Laurie McMaster

Wednesdays, March 1—April 4, 4:30 p.m. in Room 238

Led by Jo Forrest

No registration needed !

LWP



Miles and his Jelly Bean Prayer

a COLORFUL Lenten Countdown

By Denise Burke
WECEP Executive Director



activity allows the children to track their own sacrifices and good deeds with colorful jelly beans as they learn the reason for our Easter Resurrection celebrations. On Easter morning they wake to find the rest of their container filled with white jelly beans. The white jelly beans represent the Grace of Christ. The children learn that the Grace of Christ is a gift. The bonus is they get to enjoy eating the sweet jelly beans on Easter! ■

When teaching young children about Christianity it is important to talk about Jesus on a regular basis, not just during holidays. At WECEP the children are blessed to have teachers dedicated to enriching their lives by modeling and teaching how to live life according to Jesus. Throughout the year you will see the children reading Bible stories in their class, saying prayers, and doing crafts related to lessons surrounding the Bible.

Prayer and kindness are everyday themes at WECEP, but lessons surrounding the Christian holidays are made to be extra special. One lesson led by Ms. Kelly on Ash Wednesday is the Lenten Jelly Bean Prayer Activity. This is a fun, age-appropriate lesson that teaches the virtues of Lent. Ms. Kelly introduces the lesson to the children, and then they take it home to enjoy with their families as they count down to the celebration of Jesus's Resurrection. This colorful



Miss Megan reading Bible Adventures with a student

Learning in Lent

By Sara Kyle

Sara is the editor of the Spire, and organizer of the Westminster Seminars



During the season of Lent we turn inward to examine our spiritual lives. We ask ourselves how we are following Jesus, how consistently we keep God with us in all our words and actions. And of course, we want to do better. Lent is a welcome time for reflection, enrichment, and renewal for our souls.

It's also a time for learning as we seek to gain new insights from scripture about the final days of Christ's ministry on earth. To help guide our efforts, the Lenten series of Westminster Seminars offers the opportunity to learn from the Rev. Dr. James E. Davison, a former pastor at Westminster who has led many of our seminars over the years. Here is an outline of the series:

“On the Way to Easter with John's Gospel”

The Gospel of John is markedly different from the other three Gospels. One major difference is the amount of space that John gives to conversations between Jesus Christ and individual people. In this series, we will look at major persons and groups toward the end of the Gospel, and how they participate in the events leading to Good Friday and Easter. What do they think of Jesus, and what does their

response to him say about faith and life...for them and for us?

Plan to come to any one or all of the March seminars—no preparation needed, just a heart seeking to walk with our living and loving God. ■

March Westminster Seminars

- March 5 John: A “Spiritual Gospel”
- March 12 The Jews: Authorities and Leading Citizens
- March 19 The Romans: Pilate and Soldiers
- March 26 The Disciples: Peter, John, and Mary Magdalene

Read more about the seminars on the church website.

<https://www.westminster-church.org/events/event-list/westminster-seminars>



Scan the QR code with your smart phone

Thank you Lord—for Google



Top photo: Ab's baked dessert
Middle and bottom photos: the kids enjoying the exhibits at the Carnegie Science Center

By Carolyn Kerr

Carolyn serves on the Personnel and Communications Commissions

It may seem odd – and oddly specific – to be thanking God for software, but that is a shared gratitude among the members of the refugee resettlement team. It allows us – with momentary delays – to share laughter and to ask and answer questions such as what are the Arabic words for Father (Ab) or Baba as the children call him or Mother (Omm) or Mama as the children say.

One team goal is to keep the congregation and friends in the loop on how the family is doing. This update shares some of the things the team needed to “seek” this past fall as well as what we seek for this wonderful family for the future.

Some of what we've appreciated:

- The support of crossing guards Mary and Jerry who helped the family learn how to get the children to school safely
- The librarian who welcomed the family and eagerly offered to work with them
- The man at the local gas station who welcomed them to the neighborhood
- Miss Betty next door who provided a couch for the front porch (they are truly Pittsburghers now!)
- The staff at the school district who helped our team set up accounts so that the parents can track the excellent performance by their children
- A dentist and her staff at a pediatric dental practice who moved patients around to handle a dental emergency that left the middle child crying in pain during the night

And then there were our four get-togethers to share how various things are celebrated in America:

- The requested traditional Thanksgiving dinner – with the most delicious dessert provided by Ab (father)
- A trip to the Carnegie Science Center for the entire family
- A freezing temperature-postponed holiday get-together
- A birthday party (six of the seven have birthdays in January and early February)

Most of all, we sought to find employment for Ab. God provided a job that not only will provide benefits for the family but is actually in his field of expertise as a baker.

Now what we seek is to continue to help them take the next steps. Ab's commute is about an hour each way so we are hoping to find a way to help them acquire a car to make things easier in all kinds of ways. We are also seeking a part-time job for Omm (mother) if we can get the young twins enrolled in Head Start. The children would like a ping pong table if anyone has one they do not use.

The short version is that mostly we seek your continued prayers for this wonderful family. And if your schedule has changed and you'd like to become involved in a more hands on way, our team is eager to welcome you to this family – our family, now – who some of us have taken to calling “The Blessings.” For they truly are. ■



A *Journey* ENDS

A Farewell by *Louise Rogers*

My friends,

As I end my journey with you, I am grateful for the many kind words in notes, cards, gifts, and visits to my office over the past few weeks.

The reception, given in my honor on January 15, was a delightful way to celebrate our years of ministry together. The day was filled with delicious food in a stunning Fellowship Hall with many well wishes given by the congregation for me and my family.

With God's leading, this church graced by the dedicated staff and Jo Forrest, along with the faithful elders and deacons, will continue to thrive. The Scriptures say what is in my heart, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now."

Grace and Peace to all,

Louise Rogers



Louise Rogers and her husband Bill

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

Lent Worship Schedule

Ash Wednesday – February 22

Prayer Stations (WROC): 5:30 p.m.

Worship (Sanctuary): 6:30 p.m.

Sundays during Lent

8:30 a.m. / 9:45 a.m. / 11:00 a.m.

Palm Sunday – April 2

8:30 a.m. / 9:45 a.m. / 11:00 a.m.

Maundy Thursday – April 6

7:30 p.m.

Easter Worship Schedule

Easter Sunday – April 9

8:30 a.m. / 9:45 a.m. / 11:00 a.m.

Words to Live By

I do not think that I will ever reach a stage when I will say, "This is what I believe. Finished."

What I believe is alive ... and open to growth.

—Madeleine L'Engle

