

# THE SPIRE



LENT 2024



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

# GOV

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A covenant is a deep, soul-level connection that binds one to another. Since the beginning of our faith, God saves us with enduring promises.

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## *God's Promises*

# LENT



Read the *Spire* online at:  
[westminster-church.org/news-&-media/the-spire-online](http://westminster-church.org/news-&-media/the-spire-online)

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## The Reverend LAURA BENTLEY

Laura is excited to join the Westminster community to serve as parish associate. She is passionate about helping people feel connected to one another and to God in their ordinary, everyday lives. She is a 2016 graduate of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and was ordained in 2017 as a PC(USA) Minister of Word and Sacrament. She was ordained as the pastor of a new worshipping community, and most recently served as an associate pastor at Southminster Presbyterian Church. She strives to bring creativity and warmth to all she does in ministry, as well as a good dose of humor and flexibility.

Laura has found ministry most meaningful as she has walked alongside folks in transitions, whether celebratory or challenging. She feels called to discover God's abiding presence amid change and uncertainty, and to cultivate a community of care in the church that truly grieves and rejoices together. We never walk the path of faith alone, and whether it is in worshipping together, sharing a meal, or exchanging a text, Laura's desire as a pastor is to deepen our ties as a community and to deepen our trust in God's love and grace.

Laura lives in Mount Lebanon with her husband, Ed, two children, Junia (8) and Oscar (4), and two dogs, Calvin and Waffles. In her free time, she enjoys hiking, traveling, and reading good books while sipping good coffee.

## From the Office of JO FORREST

Senior Pastor & Head of Staff



Dr. Jo Forrest

Remember the sacred, childhood promises you sealed with a pinky swear? Or maybe you cut your finger and exchanged red droplets to be blood siblings. Eww.

In college, perhaps you publicized your romance by exchanging fraternity lavaliers and pins or you might let a sweetheart wear your letter jacket.

Later, we sealed commitments with rings.

From our earliest days, we craft rituals and symbols to signify a relationship blossoming from affection and loyalty, maybe even exclusivity.

Even these elaborate and public displays might fall apart or allow the other person to presume the wrong thing. We create and execute contracts, pre- and post-nuptial, to define the boundaries of our commitments.

Don't we just want people to do what they promise to do? The season of Lent invites us to consider how we live into the promises God makes to us, even before Jesus' ministry, in the various covenants – and if we need to change our ways of living.

Following this strand through the texts might be especially applicable during the season when many of us make promises – no chocolate, fasting on Fridays, abstaining from social media – that will prove to us yet again that we desperately need a God who is better at keeping promises than we are.

God makes promises to us. Although there is some expectation of responsibility on the part of humanity, ultimately God makes the promises and God keeps them. Join in worship and the various ministries at Westminster as we explore this good news.



# My Covenant Life



The Prophet Ezekiel, Russian Orthodox icon, 15th century

**By Sara Kyle**

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

The meaning of covenant in Old Testament stories was puzzling to me as a child in Sunday school. But in 1965 I saw “covenant” grow to embrace a different way of learning and living. The Covenant Life Curriculum came to our Presbyterian church, and Sunday school became exciting. Covenant Life was divided into three themes: the Bible, the church, and Christian life. This was a new, broader approach to Christian education, and it worked for me. The books were challenging and fascinating. Old Testament study included history and a timeline. The story of the church told its history from the very beginning. I met Augustine, Martin Luther, and John Calvin. My faith started to make sense. In a practical way, I learned that Christian life meant more than simply being a good girl. We were called to actively care for all our neighbors, particularly ones who didn’t look like us or live in our physical neighborhoods. God’s covenant with us embraced all aspects of life and learning as a child of God.

The Covenant Life Curriculum became the foundation of my formation as a Christian. I still have seven volumes that I treasure. The first is titled *The Church Is for All People*. Indeed!

In March, Old Testament scholar Steven Tuell will lead a Lenten seminar series on God’s everlasting covenants. He will discuss covenants with exalted individuals – such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David – and then leave us with how the Lord has an everlasting covenant with the people. This covenant will stay with us forever.

As part of your Lenten journey, join in exploring God’s everlasting covenants at the Westminster Seminars on Sunday mornings. Read more on the church website. ■



# SILENCE AND THE STILLNESS

By *Christine Hestwood*  
Music Director

In my work, I am constantly surrounded by sound. You may be surprised to know that I rarely listen to music in my car or at home. I typically only listen to music when I'm studying a score or selecting music for church.

You won't be surprised to learn that I'm a high extrovert. I always seek opportunities to engage with others, be it for work or social events. I am energized by others. Being a high extrovert is exhausting. Constant motion is my *modus operandi*. I am rarely still. I love a good sleep in on a Saturday. But once I'm up, I'm out the door.

I'm not going to give up anything for Lent. Rather, I'm going to add something. I'm going to add silence and stillness. The Cherub Choir often reminds us that big change starts small. I'm going to start small with ten minutes of complete silence. Just me and my thoughts. After I acclimate to the "sound of silence," I'll be adding devotions.

If you are compelled to add some stillness to your routine, find a quiet space, a comfy chair, excellent speakers, and a recording of Mahler's 2nd Symphony, the Resurrection Symphony. It's 90 minutes in length and scored for a massive orchestra, soloists, and chorus. There are five movements, so you can break it into more manageable "chunks." Make sure to have translations of the texts ready. The final choral entrance is stunning, some of the most powerful minutes of music I have ever heard. Perfect listening for Lent.

By the time you read this, I will hopefully be two weeks into this promise to myself. Writing this article is accountability – please stop me and ask how it's going! Let me know if you listen to Mahler's 2nd Symphony! ■

"Be still and know that I am God."

Psalm 46:10

# MyWPC

## CONNECTING at WESTMINSTER

By Anna Hiner

Membership & Communications Coordinator

When I started working at Westminster in 2006, we were on the cutting edge of, well, 2006. We printed newsletters on different colored paper using cutesy clipart; we created mailing labels in Word documents; and WROC classes were announced quarterly via a printed catalog of classes.

The staff had a database of church members that we weren't utilizing to its full potential. A few of us on staff started exploring that database and finding a myriad of ways to update it and use it to not only streamline our workload but also to better connect with you. Next, we discovered an email marketing tool that worked with our database and allowed us to send emails instead of paper newsletters. I was most excited when we created a WROC website to replace the quarterly paper catalog!

Though our methods have changed, our goal has always been to invite you to the upcoming activities happening here at Westminster. And whether it was a paper newsletter or an email, you showed up, and you continue to show up.

Here we are in 2024! In January we updated our database to a new system called Realm® with our longtime ministry partner, ACS Technologies. Within the church we call this system **MyWPC**, and it is now the most reliable way to connect with your church and to view and register for upcoming events.

Let's come together to see Jesus in each other and be "mutually encouraged by each other's faith" (Romans 1:12).

Read more about MyWPC at [https://www.westminster-church.org/my\\_WPC](https://www.westminster-church.org/my_WPC) or scan the QR code to the right with your device. For questions or assistance, or to let me know how much you love MyWPC, don't hesitate to reach out! ■



# Deacons Called to Serve

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.”

1 Peter 4:10-11

*By Alecia Klonicke*  
*Moderator, Board of Deacons*

**T**his Bible passage is perfect to describe the Deacons at Westminster, a group of people of all different ages, abilities, strengths, backgrounds, and beliefs that have been called to serve our congregation.



The Deacons have multiple activities throughout the year to reach our members. Blood Drives through Vitalant are held three times a year, Easter flowers and Christmas poinsettias are delivered, meals and cards are shared with those who perhaps have a family member in the hospital or who need a caring embrace or a thinking of you. We also facilitate fellowship gatherings at Friendship Village and Providence Point. One of our favorite and most meaningful activities is extending communion to individuals who are not

able to share in the holy sacrament in person. We are constantly evolving our outreach strategies and are hoping to implement fresh ideas this year through new endeavors.

Our main goal is staying connected with our members. It is easy to see the compassion and genuine love the Deacons have for the congregation, its members, and of God. The Deacons serve wholeheartedly; by serving our congregation, we serve God. ■



# Molded in the Hands of a Loving God

Reaching into the dust of the earth, God began shaping humanity.  
Satisfied with this new creation, God brought us to life with God's own breath.  
Enlivened through the breath of God, humanity came into being.  
Not just alive, but alive to having needs.  
Alive to a life inseparable from God.  
From dust we have come,  
And to dust we shall return,  
Always in the hands of a loving God.

By Faith Kemmler  
Director of Children's & Family Ministry

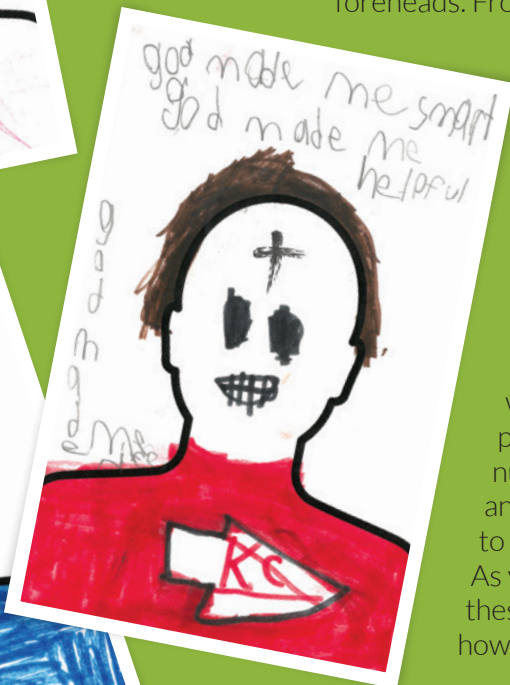
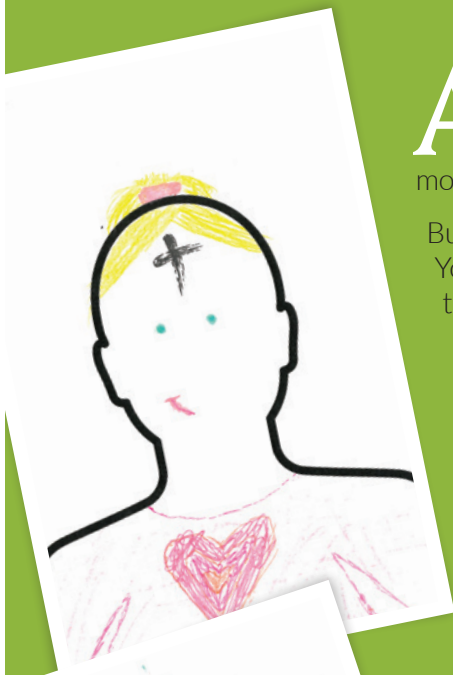
As Wednesday and Lent can be intimidating topics to broach with children. It is a struggle to face our own mortality, and far more difficult to encourage our young ones to do the same. Death and dying are taboo on their own and even more so when we think about how it relates to children.

But children, just like adults, are brought to life with the same God-filled breath. Young and old, we are alive with the same need for God's love. And how wonderful that is!

This Lent, our children reflected on what it means to be a unique, wonderful, and good part of God's creation. They drew self-portraits with ashes imposed on their foreheads. From ages 4 to 12, we

contemplated what makes us unique. Around the children's heads, they wrote about the characteristics God gifted them with.

At their baptisms, we as the body of Christ made a covenant with each child. We promised to guide and nurture them, to love and pray for them, and to encourage them to know and follow Christ. As you look through their portraits, remember these sacred baptismal covenants and consider how you can continue to uphold them. ■







# Women's Ministry

By Mandy Thomas



After they studied the same Advent devotional, the LIFT book group and Women2Women Emerald joined together for an evening of fellowship and painting.



Women Belonging Retreat, November 2023

About two years ago, I was restless. It was December 2021 and I had stepped away from church. Life felt hard, COVID was hard, personal things were hard. But God was calling me back to my church home, my beloved Westminster. I was ready to return to church and wanted to focus on Women's Ministry. I contacted Megan Exley, then chair of the Adult Spiritual Development Commission.

By coincidence (or design?) Megan too had been praying about Women's Ministry. She also had been in conversation with others about it. It turns out I wasn't the only one who felt like the previous two years were hard. Without planning, I found a group of women just like me, hungry for connection and friendship, who wanted deeper ties, and who were willing to dream with me about what it could be.

The movement grew. We hosted a women's retreat last fall. We started gathering on Thursday evenings as a "book club" – though really, you never have to read the book. We gather in each other's homes. We call and text each other during hard times. We come alongside and hold hands.

In short, we have made friends – which isn't always easy as adults.

Small groups are where Jesus snuggles in real close. "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20). I feel his presence, moving and alive, among us as we seek to find ways to serve him and his church. His promises are kept by the people who gather in his name.

Come, join us. There is room in this circle for you. All are welcome. ■

# Find Your “Street MOMs”

*“There but for the grace of God, go I.”*

By Mary Zora



**A**lthough I have often used this phrase, it now has more of a profound meaning as I support and pray for individuals who wake up each morning in temporary or inadequate housing. The Bible recognizes that some people have experienced terrible trauma and hardships, even to the point of becoming destitute. Luke 14:13-14: “When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed.”

For the past three years I have been blessed to work with Street MOMs and witness compassion and service for a population in our society that is often overlooked and diminished. Our work constantly reinforces the reality that homelessness is rooted in a very diverse set of circumstances that are entirely unique to each individual. Teachers will tell you, when asked about dreams for the future, no child ever responds, “I want to be homeless, live in a tent, and have food insecurity.”

While sitting in my car with a friend not long ago, we saw a young woman walking beside the railroad tracks. Her belongings were strapped to her back, and she was seemingly cold, weak, and tired. My companion pointed to her and made a few unkind remarks. I responded, “That young woman is someone’s daughter, sister, granddaughter, friend ...”

Once again, I thought, “There but for the grace of God, go I!”

I encourage you to find your “Street MOMs,” the place where you physically or financially serve “the least of these” (Mathew 25:40). ■



**Jesus said to his disciples in Mark 6:37: “You give them something to eat.”**

At Westminster we take this seriously and put these words into action.

In February alone we have:

- Filled and delivered 130 Blizzard Bags to the senior citizens cared for by Meals on Wheels
- Served meals at a church in Overbrook with Living Stones
- Staffed Rise Against Hunger 300 volunteers strong to send 40,176 meals out to children in need
- Raised \$6,045\* of our goal of \$15,000 to increase the number of people we can feed in 2024.

Let’s keep it going. If you would like to help feed the people Mary has gotten to know in West Virginia, we will be preparing a hot meal for them here in our kitchen on Sunday, March 17, at 1:00 p.m. Scan the QR code below to sign up.

\*As of 02/27/2024





# The Embrace of Westminster

By Brian Eccher

**O**n Wednesday, December 13, Westminster held the first "A Quiet Christmas," which promised a time to slow down and reflect amidst the frenzy of the holiday season. As my wife and I entered the candlelit sanctuary for the service, my mind was still decompressing from the workday and we took our seats near the aisle. I had volunteered for a reading, assumed the spot at the front of the church, and began what was to be a brief devotional. However, when I spoke the words "I will pray when you cannot," a wave of emotion overcame me. I cannot tell you what I was thinking at that moment, but the week before my dad had begun chemotherapy for lung cancer. I struggled to hold back tears and could not get out the last two sentences. Fortunately, my wife was able to finish them for me. I lit my candle, said a prayer, and sat back down – a bit embarrassed if I am being honest.

What happened next is something I will never forget. As those in attendance lined up in the aisle to come forward and light their candles, I began to receive hugs. Whether it was a hand on my shoulder, an arm around my neck, or in one case a full-on bear hug, the people of Westminster physically reached out to support me. They did not know why I had shed tears, but they saw my pain

and wanted to comfort me. Some of these were people I have known for a long time; others were individuals I may have met only in a church meeting or waved to at a service. To hug a family member or close friend is easy. To hug someone outside of that inner circle carries a different weight and can mean even more.

When you think of Westminster what comes to mind? The music? The sanctuary? Vacation Bible School? For me it will forever be the embrace of an entire church community at a most unexpected time. ■



A Quiet Christmas, 2023.

# A Covenant Between Westminster and the Endowment & Special Gifts Fund

*By Rob Wagner, Past Chair  
Deborah Waller, Chair*



God made a covenant to Abraham that he and generations to follow would receive great blessings. Westminster's Endowment is a form of a generational covenant from our "Westminster ancestors" meant to bless our church well into the future.

In 2019, Westminster was faced with very difficult decisions relating to financial malfeasance from our prior business administrator. A large amount of money was owed to the IRS and the Endowment was the only viable place to borrow funds. Our pastors met with Endowment and Session representatives in December and an agreement was reached for a \$1,259,000 loan with a 10-year term at 4% interest, a rate that corresponds to the percentage the Endowment gives out of its corpus each year.

In 2021, the Endowment Committee finished work on an agreement which would document this loan. Enter our new senior pastor, Jo Forrest, who arrived at our church in the middle of a pandemic and a large loan obligation! Jo considered the language with one change – the term "Loan Agreement" should be changed to "Covenant," to reflect God's presence at the foundation. Both the Endowment Committee and Session approved the document.

Our 10-year loan has been reduced to an 8-year loan due to generous gifts which prepaid part of it. With just 5 years remaining, please consider a financial gift to the church that would reduce this term even further.

Hang in there, Westminster! It is probably tempting to ask why the Endowment does not forgive the loan because the church could certainly use the extra \$12,753 per month. Please remember that donations to the fund were meant to protect the long-term capital and program needs of the church. These gifts were crucial in providing a critical loan in our time of need.

The donors to the fund made a covenant between current and future generations of Westminster. We will look back proudly when the loan is paid off as we add our names to this covenant. Thank you to all Westminster members. ■

**I**n Genesis, the rainbow is a sign of a covenant between God and his people, promising care and protection.

In legal terms, a covenant is a written agreement promising the performance of certain actions.

When Westminster's Refugee Resettlement Team executed a written agreement to sponsor a family, we made a covenant in both senses of the word. We promised to carry out certain duties required by the resettlement agency, but the unwritten promise was to care for and protect this family.

We maintained confidentiality to protect their identities. We respected their Muslim faith. We didn't ask prying questions, but showed compassion for what we could only imagine they had endured.

We accomplished the tasks assigned to us. We furnished housing, applied for benefits on their behalf, enrolled the children in school, oversaw their medical care, found employment for the adults, and oriented the family to their new culture.

But we did so much more. In the first month, a group of volunteers stood by at 4:00 a.m. to provide transportation in case the wage earner missed the bus. When the children were sick, we responded to their call for help, no matter the hour. We became "aunties" to the toddler twins. We taught Dad how to drive. We helped the family plant a vegetable garden. We sent the children to summer camp. We celebrated everyone's birthdays.

While our yearlong legal commitment to the family has expired, the bond of friendship and love remains our covenant with them.

As you read this, the team is in the early weeks of covenanting with a new family. May God bless their journey. ■

# Promises Fulfilled

*By Roberta Sarraf  
Refugee Resettlement Team*



As we enter the season of Lent, our church family embarks on a spiritual journey of introspection and renewal. This year's theme, "Covenant," encourages us to reflect upon the promises, agreements, and ways of behaving that God desires of us. In other words, why we do what we do as Christians.

# Stewardship

By *Broc Sleek*  
Stewardship Commission



(Left-to-right) Colby, Broc, Olivia, and Brooke Sleek.

Throughout the year, especially around the holidays and Lent, we reflect on why we give. We give because we can witness the tangible impact of our gifts in action. All around the church we see constant reminders that our contributions, whether big or small, play a vital role in sustaining our church's mission and ministry.




Moreover, our giving is driven by the understanding that the church depends on these gifts to ensure its presence for generations to come. We envision a future where our children and grandchildren can also find solace, community, and spiritual growth within these sacred walls. Our stewardship today secures the church's legacy for the adults they will become.

In the face of the numerous needs tugging at our hearts, the choice to give to Westminster reflects our dedication to preserving and nourishing this spiritual home. It is a testament to the enduring covenant we share as a church family.

As we journey through Lent together, let us explore the depth and significance of our covenant with God, finding inspiration in our shared commitment to serve, worship, and give. May this season of reflection strengthen our resolve to fulfill the promises we make to ourselves and God and deepen our understanding of why we do what we do, so the glory of God's covenant endures forever.



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

# Easter Flowers **ORDER FORM**

The Chancel Guild is accepting memorial or honoree contributions for Easter flowers. Use the form below and make your check payable to Westminster Presbyterian Church and write "Easter Flowers" on the memo line. Mail your check and form to the church office or place it in the collection plate.

Contributions must be received no later than Sunday, March 17, so that your gift can be listed in the Easter bulletin. Please indicate if you plan to pick up your flower or whether you would like it delivered to a member in care. Flowers will be available on Easter Sunday, after the 9:45 a.m. or 11:00 a.m. services, or Monday, April 1, from 9:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m.

**A suggested minimum donation of \$25 will cover the cost of the flowers. Additional donations beyond that will be used to support the work of the Chancel Guild throughout the year.**

My name \_\_\_\_\_

In memory of       In honor of

Name of memorial/honoree (PLEASE PRINT)

\_\_\_\_\_

Please deliver flower to a member in care       I will pick up the flower on Easter Sunday after the 9:45 a.m. or 11:00 a.m. services, or Monday, April 1, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

***Please return this form to the church office by Sunday, March 17.***