

PENTECOST 2023

THE SPIRE



A publication of
WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH



**Filled with
the Spirit!**

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Cover artwork:
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 By Sandy Conley

Media: Pastels

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From the Office of **JO FORREST**

Senior Pastor & Head of Staff



Dr. Jo Forrest



Celebration 1997
by John August Swanson
Courtesy Vanderbilt University
Divinity Library



One of Our Loyal Readers ...

Two year-old
Jaxon Ecklin reading the
previous issue of the *Spire*

Think of those places you felt a rush of wind. The beach. Between the canyons of buildings on a city sidewalk. Frigid nights at PNC Park.

I'm not referring to the time the wind merely refreshed the stale air. Remember the time you felt humbled, the wind ruffled your feathers with discomfort, or plain knocked you off your feet.

Just before Jesus ascended into heaven, he breathed on his followers. In that fiery spirit, many of his followers experienced those emotions to an even greater magnitude.

What we know to be true: the spirit of Pentecost changed the world.

Some might say, God changed the world by entering human history as Jesus, forever resetting our time from *before* to *after*. And Easter's empty tomb that sent the disciples running with awe.

Pentecost changed the world by gifting each of us with the spirit to be Christ's hands and feet. This same spirit of Pentecost still sends us out to be his church.

We see the spirit moving through you at Westminster. Sometimes unsettling. Always creative. Blowing open the doors to new people.

Will you give yourself over to this spirit? To become what God intends?

Scripture tells us that despite this milestone event some people doubted. They missed out.

Linger over the stories in these pages. Wonder about the ways the spirit nudges you to be a part of this new birth. Forget about doubt. Instead, let yourself be blown away. ■

SPIRIT AT WORK

*“But the Lord said to
Ananias, “Go...” Acts 9:15a*



By Ed Sutter
*Senior Director of
Christian Education*

Some of my favorite stories in scripture are those when the Spirit is working in separate places, at the same time, for the same cause. There are a handful of these stories, but the one that always stands out to me is in Acts chapter nine. It's the story of Saul (who will become the writer of so much of our New Testament, named Paul) and his conversion. Saul, a notorious leader well-known for his work in snuffing out Jesus' followers, suddenly has a vision of the Lord and is struck blind. At that same time, Ananias, a follower of Jesus' way, has a separate vision of the Lord. Ananias, who knows all about Saul and the path of death and imprisonment in his wake, is called to go and meet with the very man he fears. Saul needs Ananias, and Ananias is called to meet him. Unexpected, daunting, and confusing: neither man knows what to expect, but they both know that the Spirit is at work.

That's been my sense around here, recently. You've heard me say this before, but I'm going to keep on saying it: The Spirit is doing something. I've been a part of enough conversations in which completely unrelated people are sensing the same need, and working to meet it. I've heard your stories of growth and transformation. I've spent mornings with people who have a need, and afternoons with people hard

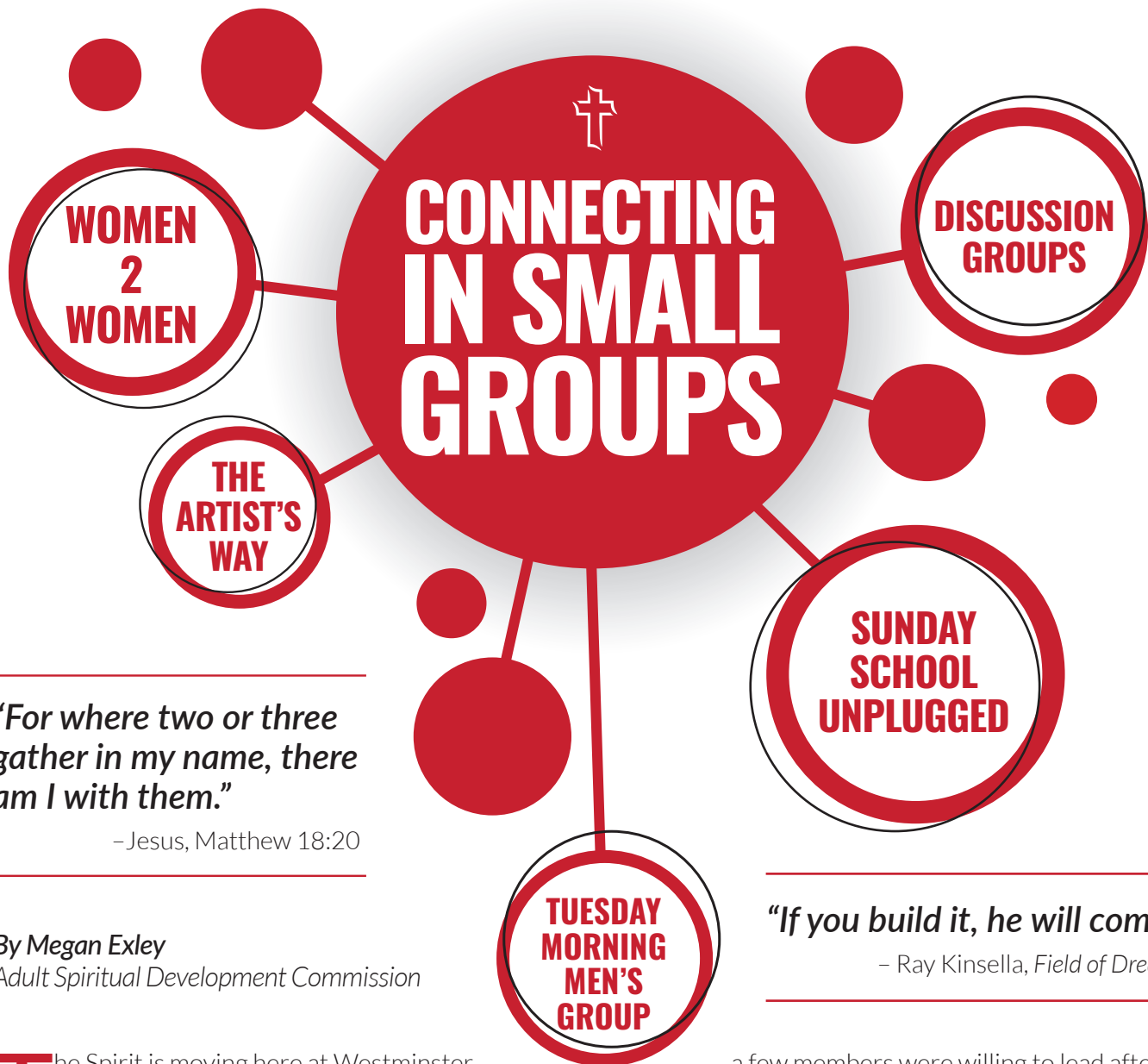
at work to meet needs they didn't even know existed. The Spirit is working in multiple places, at the same time, for the same purpose.

I don't want to be too hasty about any of this, but the picture is becoming increasingly clear to me as I've paid closer attention. It's about connection and community. I think that's what I see growing. So many of us are feeling the need, and there are leaders all around us stepping up to fill it – all because of the work of the Spirit.

There's a deeply important note, here. The growth, connection, and vitality of this community has extremely little to do with these leaders who are rising up. 1 Corinthians 3:7 tells us that it is “only God who makes things grow.” Again, I say: The Spirit is doing something.

This church is alive because of the work that God is doing and the life that Jesus has given us. Keep your eyes and your hearts open, my friends. If you sense that the Spirit might be calling you in a particular direction, there might just be a person who needs you on the other end of that call.

If you've felt a nudge, I'd love to hear about it. ■



“For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

– Jesus, Matthew 18:20

*By Megan Exley
Adult Spiritual Development Commission*

The Spirit is moving here at Westminster. Folks are longing for connection. As humans, we’re built for connection. Even God in the flesh spent time in relationship with other humans. Jesus spent his life connecting—calling disciples, healing the sick, and dining with friends. We feel that divine connection with God and one other during our worship services. If you’ve participated in a small group, you’ve likely experienced how that human-divine connection can become even more personal when we’re face to face, sharing of ourselves, such as during the Tuesday Morning Men’s Group, Women 2 Women, or Sunday School Unplugged.

Have you tried a small group? Maybe you’ve wanted to, but none fit your schedule or interests? Let’s change that! We are always willing to support new groups.

Our Lenten Devotional discussion groups came about because Jo Forrest found a beautiful devotional and

“If you build it, he will come.”

– Ray Kinsella, *Field of Dreams*

a few members were willing to lead after receiving some initial guidance from Jo. Also, Christine Hestwood recently convened a circle for The Artist’s Way. These groups provide meaningful connection beyond the church pews.

The Adult Spiritual Development Commission continues to look for salient materials and willing leaders. And our hope and prayer is that you all will feel empowered to bring forward your own ideas for small groups. Jo, Ed, and the Adult Spiritual Development Commission are here to provide support and guidance to help bring your group to life. Let’s get started! “If you build it, he will come.”

Do you have an idea? Do you feel called to build a small group? Please reach out to Megan Exley at meganexley@gmail.com or Ed Sutter sutter@westminster-church.org. ■

WELL

Made Me Do It!

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

Two years ago, a pastor friend called to tell me about a job opening at a large church in the South Hills that she thought I would be perfect for. I told her that I was not interested, and yet she continued to reach out every few weeks asking if I had reconsidered. "The congregation is lovely and welcoming. The building is beautiful. There are so many children and families!" But I was not ready to make the leap.

At the time, there was just too much going on in my life and the world. COVID vaccines had only recently become available to the public. In-person ministry programs were beginning to resume at my church. I was struggling to cope with the daily effects and restrictions of a new chronic illness. The political climate and injustices happening in our country were affecting my relationships with family members, friends, and congregation members. For the last few years, I had watched churches across the country sign their own death warrant through both malicious action and apathetic inaction toward the way our world was hurting. It was hard for me to filter through the muck and get to where God was. I was ready to give up on church and vocational ministry. I just could not see its value in my life anymore.

All the while, my friend kept pestering me about this job opportunity. It took a few months for her to finally wear me down, and by June I decided to apply. I was fairly certain that I did not want to work for a church and thought I had no chance at this job, so I decided there was nothing to lose. If I was meant to continue with church, the job would work out. If not, I was ready to set aside church and find a new path.

From my first interview, I could tell Westminster was a special place, and now almost two years later I know that to be true. Seeing the Spirit move through Westminster has refreshed me in ways I could not have imagined were possible, and to be honest, it all crept up on me. We often look for God in the big moments, but how often do we consciously open our eyes to her presence in the seemingly mundane?

On Wednesday nights, I marvel at the questions our fifth and sixth graders are wrestling with. On Sunday mornings, it brings me joy to see so many children feel at home in worship and Sunday school. In texts, emails, and passing conversations, I can see and feel how alive this body of believers is. There is no need to look for signs of life because this church body is dancing and running and shouting God's love for the world to hear. ■

Friendship *Is Caring*

By Rev. Ann Morris
Parish Associate

Healthy congregations often are noisy congregations.

People gathered early at Westminster for the first mask-free worship service after COVID-19. They stood in the sanctuary pews and waived at church-made friends whom they had not seen for two years. People got out of their pews and walked enthusiastically to greet longtime friends. Those who found themselves sitting next to their usual pew mates chatted animatedly. The gathering was a reunion empowered by warm memories of past events and present hope for more to come.

We care about one another. A friendship at church is different from a friendship founded on commonalities of work and neighborhood, loyalty to a favorite sports team, or enjoying pickleball. Each of us worshiping at Westminster has recognized a voice coming both from within ourselves and from something larger than ourselves. It is Jesus who lives within us who calls us to meet the Jesus who dwells within all who love him. This recognition of the risen Christ living within all of us is tantamount to the disciples' eyes suddenly opened in recognition after eating with the resurrected Jesus.

Our Christian friendships are imbued with this same new creation of recognition. Our eyes are opened in deeper and more meaningful ways toward a new vision of one another. We see one another through the eyes of love that leads to caring for one another.

Congregational care extends not just to the sick, bereaved, and lonely. Caring for members and friends of this congregation is not a task limited to ministers, elders, deacons, and prayer groups. Care comes naturally among friends, so that all are cared for when we extend friendship to one another. Let our eyes be opened to recognize God's new creation working in one another. Do it in memory of him. ■

Do you know Ann Morris?



Ann and Bob Morris joined Westminster in 1984, and made lifelong friends there through the Genesis adult education class, social events, and worship. Because WPC's seminar program was taught by

many staff from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Ann felt lead to explore a call to ordained ministry.

Ordained in 2003, she served a small church in Pittsburgh Presbytery and filled many vacant pulpits in Allegheny and Beaver counties and is active in the International Association of Women Ministers.

Ann graduated from Grove City College and received a master's in business administration from the University of Pittsburgh. Before entering the ministry, Ann worked in the treasury departments of Joy Technologies and Westinghouse Electric.

Ann and Bob live in Mt. Lebanon and are voracious readers. Having recently become grandparents, they enjoy traveling the PA Turnpike to Philadelphia to visit their daughter Maureen and her family.

Westminster's Pet Ministry RELAUNCHES



The meanest animals are equally the children of God, because they were created of the original seed of the Word of God.

John Calvin, 1509-1564

By Douglas Florey

When John Calvin wrote those words 500 years ago, at the very dawn of the Presbyterian Church, he couldn't have foreseen the degree to which companion animals would infiltrate human society. According to the American Veterinary Medicine Association (AVMA), about 70% of American households include a pet. That's a whopping 85 million U.S. families who share their homes and lives with at least one animal. Worldwide, more than 470 million dogs and 375 million cats are kept as pets.*

It's no surprise, then, that so many faith communities have incorporated companion animal ministries into their missions. But it may surprise you to learn that Westminster Church has its very own pet ministry! The group, like so many others, went dormant during the pandemic, but chairperson Beth Ketterman and her committee members are eager to start growing again.

The mission of Westminster Church's Pet Ministry is "... to ensure we're being good stewards of all God's creation by advocating a greater awareness of what it means to be in love and charity with our neighbors and with the living creatures of our world." More specifically, the group seeks to care for and support "people and their pets, as well as the relationships that exist between them."

One of the first actions the committee took at its relaunch meeting was to rededicate itself to the Pet Ministry's vision to cultivate, nurture, and sustain an environment that acknowledges and honors the unique relationship between

people and their pets through education, services, and events.

We will begin with:

- A Blessing of the Pets for people to celebrate their pets
- A Remembrance Service for people who have lost pets

Be on the lookout for more details in the coming months.

If any of these activities speak to the animal lover in you, I ask you to prayerfully consider joining me and committee members Beth Ketterman, David Lloyd, Amy Walker, Lynn Walliser, Dee Waters, Sue Watson, and Meghan Widmar at an upcoming Pet Ministry committee meeting. For details, please contact chairperson Beth Ketterman, kettermanb@comcast.net and 412-589-1006. ■



*Emma Bedford, Statistica, 2019



The NEW Generation of the NEXT Generation

By *Laura Ecklin*
Youth Ministry and Administrative Manager

Growth often means the gift of new opportunity. A growing family means more smiles and laughs. A growing income perhaps allows for a bigger home with more bedrooms and a bigger dinner table for that family. A growing church shares the word of God and creates a vibrant community of faith.

Part of the privilege of my job is watching students grow in front of me. Physically they grow taller in the six years they spend in Veritas, but they also grow in

their faith as they develop their own understanding of God's love. Growth also means at some point they finish the program and move on to new opportunities. In the last few years, we have turned over big groups of core Veritas attendees. And while it makes me sad to see kids I have really connected with move on, we always get new faces ready to begin.

Our current group has only experienced Veritas post-pandemic, so the retreats and events we have regularly hosted are new to them. A few weeks ago, Becky Boyer, some volunteers, and I took 13 kids to Splash Lagoon Indoor Water Park in Erie. While the trip had been part of the Veritas schedule pre-pandemic, this time only two of the 13 students had gone before with Veritas. While water slides and lazy rivers make for a fun day, the real joy of the trip is watching them get to know each other at a deeper level than a few hours a week at church allows. We spent time teaching devotional practices and lifting each other up. We laughed and played board games and braided hair. We all shared why we are important to each other and why God is important to us.

Growing pains are tough, and saying goodbye to those kids headed for their next chapter is sad, but the opportunity to drift through a lazy river with a new group of friends is a beautiful thing. ■





The Holy Spirit Comes at Pentecost

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”

Acts 2:2-4

By **Becky Boyer**
Associate Director of Youth Ministry

We are blessed with a great bunch of teenagers at Westminster. They are bright, sensitive, inclusive, and a whole lot of fun. Recently, we had a weekend retreat to Erie and stayed at a rustic church campground. We spent time each night and Sunday morning learning about different ways to connect with God through prayer. We learned how to Pray with Color and the Examen prayer.

Saturday evening, after spending the day at Splash Lagoon, we did a prayer exercise. Then we had planned to watch a movie. At least, that’s what the leaders had planned after an exhausting day. But that’s not what the youth wanted. They wanted to do an Affirmation Circle. An Affirmation Circle is when the youth take turns saying positive comments about other members of the group. When it is one person’s turn, they must say three positive things about themselves; then everyone else takes a turn saying positive comments about that person. When you have 15 teens, it takes a long time. Chaperones were struggling to stay awake, but the teens kept going – way past their bedtime.

The first time we did an Affirmation Circle was on our fall retreat to Crestfield. If I remember correctly, it was unplanned as well. It just happened. Almost like the Spirit was moving among us. Here we were, sitting around a room, just like the early Christians, talking about how we see God working in other people around us. Every one of these young Christians was able to identify special attributes given by God.

The next day I had planned to lead a prayer-walking exercise with the teens, but a heavy rain the night before made for a very muddy walk. Instead, I decided to lead another Affirmation Circle, but this time I asked the teens to affirm God, instead of each other. I asked the question, “What positive affirmations can you say about God?” There was no hesitation in naming many of the positive attributes of God and it was obvious that these teens felt God’s presence working in their lives.

There was a strong wind (Pneuma) from heaven that blew outside and inside the cabin that weekend. Each teen took turns speaking of God, as the Spirit enabled them. ■



The Pipe Organ

A Living Being

By Sara Kyle

“One might indeed say that the organ is an artfully constructed living being, which speaks and sings by means of wind and human hands. Thus, the organ in its grandeur is quite fittingly compared to the human body, that is controlled in its actions by the soul.”

—Girolamo Diruta, 1593

The wind instrument with keyboards that we call the pipe organ has been a part of Christian worship for over 1,200 years. Through the centuries it played an increasingly important role in the growth of the church. By the 1600s, the organs in European churches would look and sound familiar to us. Organs in American churches have led worship since the 18th century. At Westminster, the pipe organ is a treasure for the congregation. It lifts our voices in singing and draws us close to God through its endless combinations of beautiful sounds. As we listen, we feel joy, we are comforted, we respond in prayer. The Holy Spirit is with us.

The organ can also nourish our souls outside of worship. Over six Thursday afternoons this summer, you have the opportunity to hear Westminster’s Austin organ played by six superb musicians, each approaching the instrument in a different way. This series of free 30-minute organ

concerts is called Westminster Organ Summer. The 13th season begins on June 8. Read more about the series on the church website and plan to enjoy the concerts in person or by livestream.

“This lovely instrument, with its many voices, indeed contains within itself everything that can possibly be conceived in music. It produces a genuine, natural sound, like a whole choir of musicians...singing different melodies together.”

—Michael Praetorius, 1619



NEW BEGINNINGS

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT COMMISSION

What is a new beginning? It can be many things like moving to a new city, starting a new job, beginning a new friendship, or simply looking at something from a new perspective. New beginnings often cause us to be open to change and improvement.

What does the Bible say about new beginnings? “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

The Membership Commission has long been one of Westminster’s 12 named commissions responsible for the ministry of this church. This commission has a new name, the Community Engagement Commission, to represent the commission’s ministry more fully.

The commission focuses on engaging our congregation—our community of faith—in the life and work of this church, beginning when people first come into our building. It



Wednesday’s Food and Fellowship

By Jan Baumann

Community Engagement Commission



Rise Against Hunger volunteers help with making of food packets

runs the Welcome Center and plans and hosts various church social/food events throughout the year to provide an atmosphere where our congregation can meet and socialize with one another. Examples are Super Sunday, lunches after worship, a Veterans’ lunch, ice cream socials, etc. We are responsible for Food & Fellowship, the Wednesday evening dinners. We also created Forks & Fellowship, a ministry where people come together in each other’s homes. Bike rides are organized periodically.

All our mission opportunities are hands on and intentionally provide opportunities to mingle as we serve others in our community. We cook food to take out, serve food with Grow Living Stones, bag food for children in our food insecure areas, reach out to those experiencing homelessness in various communities with tents and supplies and hygiene products. We host a rummage sale where volunteers meet one another, and the proceeds benefit local missions. Rise Against Hunger is a unique intergenerational volunteer opportunity where even the youngest can serve with their families.

Joy in Service

By Kayla Berrott

Delivering meals to communities in need was wonderful for someone of my age. It showed me I should not take for granted what I have. While driving to deliver the meals, my mother and I brought QuickKits in case we saw anyone homeless. When handing the homeless person the kit, you felt as if you were doing God's work. The big smile on their face made my day.



(left-to-right) Rev. Walker—Pastor of Trinity A.M.E. Zion Church—Pittsburgh, Kristy Berrott, Kayla Berrott, and Olivia Bird

The people that work at the church we gave the meals to were so sweet and grateful. Since we delivered the meals weekly, they knew our names and were like old friends. Doing this really opened doors for me and this showed me that I want to help people for my job. It brings me so much joy.

Every volunteer opportunity has the goal of drawing people in, providing ways for them to connect and become involved in a way and at a time that is right for them.

This commission is also responsible for membership. We organize an Inquirers' Gathering two times a year, inviting our visitors to learn more about what it means to be a member in the Presbyterian Church. We work to assimilate new members once they join. We are also responsible for making sure that our membership is accurate and that we are removing names from membership when people move away or choose not to be an active part of the congregation. We want our roles to accurately reflect the members who actively participate in the life of this church. We continue to love and care for our senior citizens when active participation is no longer possible.



A Saturday morning bike ride

This new name, this new beginning, will help to draw attention to the ministry already in place, focus on what is important, and strive for continual improvement. ■



The WROC Celebrates 15 Years of ZUMBA!

By Kathy Long

Director, Westminster Recreation & Outreach Center (WROC)



Just have fun and move to the music. No dance experience required.

What is Zumba? According to instructor Debbie Colditz, "It's joy filled fellowship!"

In September 2007, Debbie Colditz, a newly certified instructor, launched the first Zumba class at the WROC. Zumba was new on the fitness scene; participants didn't know what to expect – one woman showed up in ballet slippers. The class was off to a slow start, but by 2010, "the WROC went crazy, we had 60 participants in class!" says Debbie.

With Debbie's welcoming spirit she created a Zumba family. Lisa Gilkes says, "Debbie refers to the group as Zumba Sisters; we celebrate birthdays and recognize when times are tough for members." The group gathers before class to share joys and concerns and remains after class to chat and connect. Lisa joined two years ago and instantly felt welcomed. "I've worked out at gyms all my life; I finally feel like I found a home. And I love the range of ages from 30 to 90!"

Zumba participant Carol Munne had a similar experience, "I have always felt welcome. I feel God here, I love that it's a church. Being a native of the Dominican Republic I immediately felt a connection to my Latin roots from the international songs and dances." Even when injuries prevented her from working out, Carol came to class just to connect. She says other students do the same. "They



Stacie Metrose celebrates her 90th birthday with Instructor Debbie Colditz

may be going through an illness or injury and may need to sit in a chair for class, but the connection is so important."

Class participant Stacie Metrose celebrated her 90th birthday in January. The class sang "Happy Birthday" and presented her with a crown and birthday sash. She has been with Debbie since the beginning and says she'll never give it up. Her secret to longevity is to keep the mind and body active. "Being

social has a lot to do with aging well, too," says Stacie. "I'm proud of being 90 and I'm blessed with the best of health. Maybe I can influence others to keep moving, too."

Debbie feels blessed to have her Zumba family. People want to have fun while working out and Zumba lends itself to that party feel. But at the WROC, it's more about fellowship and the community. "It's unity, and I get to share my passion on a regular basis with all these wonderful people." ■

QUESTIONS

Many, Many, Questions!

By Kristy Berrott

During a recent sermon, Dr. Jo Forrest referenced a conversation she had heard between organizational guru Adam Grant and clinical psychologist Dr. Becky Kennedy. Jo immediately caught my Sunday morning attention with her statement that Dr. Becky is working to find a way to bring out the good in everyone. Being an educator, and a mother, I live my life believing that each of God's children has good that simply needs to be encouraged.

Jo went on to describe how Mr. Grant talked to Dr. Becky about his own family dinnertime. He described the struggle he and his wife were experiencing with asking his children, "How was your day?" Like most families, the children weren't offering much in return. So, the couple rephrased their questions:

"Who helped you today?"

"Who did you see someone help?"

"What happened next?"

"What did you think about those kids?"

As a teacher, I have been trained in the power of questioning. How had I never thought about this as a parent? The questions were simple, but powerful. Jo quoted Dr. Becky: "The questions you ask someone show them the road you want them to walk." This is so true! It made me think back to the WWJD rubber bracelets I wore during youth group time. The bracelets reminded kids to ask themselves, "What would Jesus do?" Questions

can invite people to reflect and can guide their decisions.

I was recently asked to become an elder at Westminster. This was something I prayed about and did not decide lightly. I assumed that my work as an elder would be directed toward our youth programs due to my experience. On the contrary, Jo asked me to help on the Stewardship Commission. Her request made clear the road that the church needed me to walk, and I am glad to do it.

Jo's sermon coupled with my new role evoked some different questions in my mind:

"How has Westminster helped you lately?"

"When have you seen someone help others at Westminster?"

"What happened next?"

"What do you think about those people?"

"How can you get involved?"

All good teachers will tell you that one question can have multiple answers. I pray in this case that you find yourself with a wealth of answers, not limited to a small circle of members or a finite list of ways to help. Westminster has many opportunities to get involved. We also have a number of ways to pledge or donate to help keep these opportunities available. Through your family's giving we can continue to provide opportunities to serve and help the amazing people within our community. ■

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COVER ARTWORK



Painting Title: *Trinity*
Pastel painting by Sandra Conley

Artist's Statement

The painting experience is sometimes described as being Spirit led. As this painting evolved, I often felt the joy of letting God's hand guide mine.

While a dove is often the symbol for the Holy Spirit, I preferred painting an egret with downy soft feathers, a razor sharp beak, and laser like vision.

My symbol for Jesus is his pierced and healed hand being comforted by the touch of the Holy Spirit.

God the Father Creator is symbolized by the three linked circles and the intricacy of dimensions, colors, and possibilities I cannot fully comprehend, but can only start to imagine.

—Sandra Conley

ONE
SERVICE
SUNDAY

with Food and Fellowship

Please join us on Sunday, June 4, as we celebrate Pentecost and Youth Sunday at 10:00 a.m. in the sanctuary. Plan to stay after worship for food and fellowship in Fellowship Hall.

