



Getting Closer to Jesus

When times are hard, we draw close to things that comfort us, that make us feel secure, that help us to answer... *what now?!?* In the cold of winter, I am drawn to a big bowl of comfort food—chicken and dumplings, rice pudding with marmalade sauce. When I'm scared, I lock the doors and turn on all the lights. When I'm unsure what to do next, I go to trusted advisors (and yes, sometimes Google).

As we enter the new year, with lots of unknowns, and challenges that are sure to come, we can choose to move closer to Jesus for comfort, security, and direction. How do we do that? Our first gospel scriptures for the year give us some clues:

Matthew 2:1-12 – Like the Magi, move towards the light. Look for places and people where the light of God's love is shining, and move towards them bringing your own gifts. Don't hang out with the Herods of the world. Look for the light that shines in little places, not in big palaces.



Luke 3:15-22 – Like John and Jesus, move towards the water. Let go of those things that are keeping you from being a part of God's beloved community and from hearing God's declaration, "you are my beloved child!" Remember your baptism! "I've got you. You are mine!" God says.

John 2:1-11 – Like Jesus' mom, move towards tables of celebration! When you see a problem, ask Jesus for a miracle. Ask Jesus to transform the situation. He can do it... in his way and in his time.

Luke 4:14-22 – Like Jesus himself, move towards God's word and towards God's people. Open that scroll and hear God speaking to you, and about you, and the work God has given you to do. Take God's word personally. Join Jesus' liberating work of bringing release to the captives, good news to the poor, freedom to the oppressed, sight to the blind.

As we enter this new year: Move towards the Light and bring your own gifts! Move towards the Living Water and remember your belovedness. Move towards the One with the power to transform water into wine, sorrow into joy, death into life; the One who is the Vine itself, transforming us into fruit-bearing conduits of God's grace. Move towards the Word that speaks *to* you, and *about* you, and points you towards the next right thing. Move towards Jesus for the comfort, security, and direction you seek.

Your fellow seeker, pastor, and friend,

 *Caroline*

January Sermon Series: Epiphany

According to the Miriam-Webster Dictionary, an *epiphany* is, in general, “a sudden realization, an ah-ha moment.” More specifically, according to Miriam-Webster, it is “a manifestation of a divine or supernatural being.” More specifically still, it is the manifestation of Christ to persons beyond Abraham’s descendants, as represented by the Wise folks from the east who visit Jesus early in Matthew’s Gospel. It is also the name for the day, 12 days after Christmas, when we celebrate their arrival.



EPIPHANY

Each Sunday in January, the lectionary offers us gospel lessons from early in Jesus’ life and ministry that reveal something unexpected about him and yet was anticipated in God’s promises through the prophets. These sudden revelations of the divine nature made manifest in Christ, these *epiphanies*, round out our understanding of Christ and give us joy, hope, and direction as we enter a new year.

*Suggested personal spiritual discipline: read the scriptures in the week prior to Sunday.
Your Sunday worship experience will be enhanced by engaging with these texts.*

January 5: “Light to the Nations”

Epiphany Sunday/Communion/Food Bank

- † Isaiah 60:1-6
- † Matthew 2:1-12

January 19: “Miracle Worker”

Ordination of New Elders

- † Psalm 36:5-10
- † John 2:1-11

January 12: “Beloved Son”

- † Isaiah 43:1-7
- † Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

January 26: “Liberator”

- † Isaiah 61:1-4
 - † Luke 4:14-21
-

Are you a Sage or a Guide? N&CE Needs Both for Sunday School!

As many educators will tell you, there are two contrasting approaches you might use in promoting group learning:

- You can be a **sage on the stage**—one who is the master of the material, well-qualified and able to deliver the information in a way that is meaningful and sticks with those who hear what you have to say.



- Or you can be a **guide on the side**—one who isn’t necessarily the sole holder of knowledge, but is willing and able to facilitate the process of exploring and learning new things *together*.

Tina Corley, Nurture & Christian Education chair, is hoping to find new guides to help with our adult Sunday school classes: “You certainly don’t need to be an expert to lead our studies. We’ll provide materials and moral support to everyone who will help us!”

If you are interested in taking a turn as a guide, please contact Tina Corley at tinacorley50@gmail.com. Of course, if you are a Sage, you are welcome to help, as well! In January, the adults will study the book of James.

Neither a guide nor a sage? Great!! Come join us around the table as a seeker of wisdom and spiritual growth. Bring your questions and be part of the conversation!

Westminster Happenings

Wednesday | *Note: The Church Office is closed for the New Year's holiday on January 1 & 2.*
January 1 - 2

January 2 - 5 | **Montreat College Conference**
Pray for our Rainbow Fellowship participants (*see page 6*).

Saturday | **Crazy Heart Meditation Community**
January 4 | Meet in the Fellowship Hall at 10:00 A.M.
Practice patience in your meditation discipline (*see page 11*).

Breakfast
Bring your appetite to the Fellowship Hall at 8:30 A.M.

Sunday School
Adults & Youth: Remain in Fellowship Hall for 9:00 A.M. group study.
Children and Youth: Meet at 9:00 A.M. in lower-level education wing.

Sunday | **Light to the Nations**
January 5 | *Epiphany Sunday/Communion/Food Bank Collection*
Worship at 10:00 A.M. in person or via live streaming.
Heed Isaiah's call to arise and to shine—our Light has come!

Middle School Youth Group
Meet in the Sanctuary at 11:00 a.m.
Begin by joining adults in undecorating the Sanctuary.

Epiphany

Monday | **Prayer Time in the Upper Zoom**
January 6 | Look for the Monday prayer list email and click on the Zoom link at noon.
Pray together for this congregation, for friends, and for the larger world.

BEMA Bible Discussion Group
Meet in the Joe Gettys Room at 6:00 P.M.

Tuesday | **Presbyterian Women's Circle**
January 7 | Come to the Choir Room at 11:30 A.M.
Explore environmental issues via this year's study, *Let Justice Roll Down*.

Crazy Heart Meditation Community
Meet in the Fellowship Hall at 6:00 P.M.

Look! I'm doing a new thing; now it sprouts up; don't you recognize it?

Isaiah 43:19a (CEB)

Westminster Happenings, *continued*

Wednesday
January 8

Books & Brown Bags Study Group (*see page 7*)

Bring a sack supper to the Joe Gettys Room at 6:00 P.M.

Begin *Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again*.

Saturday
January 11

Crazy Heart Meditation Community

Meet in the Fellowship Hall at 10:00 A.M.

Sunday
January 12

Sunday School

Adults: Gather at 9:00 A.M. in the Choir Room.

Children and Youth: Meet at 9:00 A.M. in lower-level education wing.

Beloved Son

Worship at 10:00 A.M. in person or via live streaming.

Stand on the bank of the Jordan as John baptizes Jesus.

Session Meeting

Meet in the Joe Gettys Room at 11:15 a.m.

Conduct the business of the church as directed by the Holy Spirit.

Monday
January 13

Prayer Time in the Upper Zoom

Look for the Monday prayer list email and click on the Zoom link at noon.

Share your praises, intercessions, and supplications with our loving God.

BEMA Bible Discussion Group

Meet in the Joe Gettys Room at 6:00 P.M.

Tuesday
January 14

Crazy Heart Meditation Community

Meet in the Fellowship Hall at 6:00 P.M.

Wednesday
January 15

Books & Brown Bags Study Group

Bring a sack supper to the Joe Gettys Room at 6:00 P.M.

Continue discussion of Rachel Held Evan's book, *Inspired*.

Thursday
January 16

End of Life Seminar Series: Taking Care with a Few Last Things

Come to the Fellowship Hall at 5:00 P.M.—program begins at 5:30 P.M.

Hear about connecting with God at the end of life (*see page 8*).

Rainbow Fellowship

Connect with friends in the Youth Room upstairs at 6:00 P.M.

Enjoy lively Bible discussion and creative crafts.

Westminster Happenings, *continued*

**Saturday
January 18**

2025 Annual Session Retreat

Come together in the Joe Gettys Room at 8:30 A.M.

Seek God's guidance on Westminster's direction for 2025 and beyond.

Crazy Heart Meditation Community

Meet in the Fellowship Hall at 10:00 A.M.

**Sunday
January 19**

Sunday School

Adults: Gather at 9:00 A.M. in the Choir Room.

Children and Youth: Meet at 9:00 A.M. in lower-level education wing.

Miracle Worker

Ordination and Installation of New Elders

Worship at 10:00 A.M. in person or via live streaming.

Savor Jesus delicious miracle at a wedding in Cana.

Annual Congregational Meeting

Remain in the Sanctuary for a brief meeting.

Prepare to approve the Pastor's Terms of Call for 2025.

Sunday Sustenance

Stay for a relaxed lunch provided by Chef Rob and his sous chefs.

Bring some extra cash to contribute to the cause of the month.

**Monday
January 20**

Note: The Church Office is closed for Martin Luther King Jr. Day

BEMA Bible Discussion Group

Meet in the Joe Gettys Room at 6:00 P.M.

**Tuesday
January 21**

Crazy Heart Meditation Community

Meet in the Fellowship Hall at 6:00 P.M.

Interfaith Dialogue

Gather in the Youth Room at 6:30 P.M.

Discuss *who* or *what* God is in different world religions (*see page 10*).

**Wednesday
January 22**

Books & Brown Bags Study Group

Bring a sack supper to the Joe Gettys Room at 6:00 P.M.

Be *Inspired* by the great stories of the Bible.

**Saturday
January 25**

Crazy Heart Meditation Community

Meet in the Fellowship Hall at 10:00 A.M.

Westminster Happenings, *continued*

Sunday
January 26 | **Sunday School**
Adults: Gather at 9:00 A.M. in the Choir Room.
Children and Youth: Meet at 9:00 A.M. in lower-level education wing.
Liberator
Worship at 10:00 A.M. in person or via live streaming.
Learn how Jesus fulfills the ancient prophecy of freeing God's people.

Monday
January 27 | **Prayer Time in the Upper Zoom**
Look for the Monday prayer list email and click on the Zoom link at noon.
Share your praises, intercessions, and supplications with our loving God.
BEMA Bible Discussion Group
Meet in the Joe Gettys Room at 6:00 P.M.

Tuesday
January 28 | **Crazy Heart Meditation Community**
Meet in the Fellowship Hall at 6:00 P.M.

Wednesday
January 29 | **Books & Brown Bags Study Group**
Bring a sack supper to the Joe Gettys Room at 6:00 P.M.
Continue discussion of Rachel Held Evan's book, *Inspired*.

Westminster's College Youth Attend Conference

To kick off 2025 in style, Westminster is pleased to send a delegation of terrific young people to the annual College Youth Conference at the Montreat Conference Center in North Carolina. Our team this year is made up of Milo Bonig, Oliver Danner, Jest Dennis, Jamie Fuller, Layla Millwood, and Foster Meyer.

According to the Montreat website:

College Conference @ Montreat invites college-aged young adults to spend three days in the mountains of Western North Carolina nurturing their faith and connecting with others as they engage in worship, recreation, and critical conversations. This conference welcomes all to know and experience God's word more fully, regardless of each person's religious affiliation, area of study, or where they might be on their spiritual journey.

Through the theme "Unimaginable Possibilities: God's Hope in a Weary World," conference participants will explore the ways in which God sees us, has a plan for us, and offers healing, even when we least expect it.



Children's Class Learning More about the Temple

Submitted by Kathy Gillespie

We are *still* not through learning about the temple in Jerusalem! During his reign, King Herod rebuilt and expanded the temple. Herod doubled the size of the Temple Mount, from 17 acres to 36 acres. Herod surrounded the Temple Mount with a retaining wall and gates. Herod's rebuilding of the temple was so complete that some scholars refer to it as the third temple. However, in Jewish tradition it is considered the Second Temple, only rebuilt by Herod.



During January, the children will learn that when Jesus was a tiny baby, Mary and Joseph took him to the temple to present him to the Lord (*see page 20*). There he received blessings from Anna and Simeon. The children will learn about King Herod, the visit by the Magi, and the escape to Egypt. They will learn about Jesus visiting the temple when he was twelve. We hope the children will also have time to finish rebuilding and expanding the temple that they built when studying stories from the Old Testament, and remember that there are countless connections between the Old Testament and the New Testament!

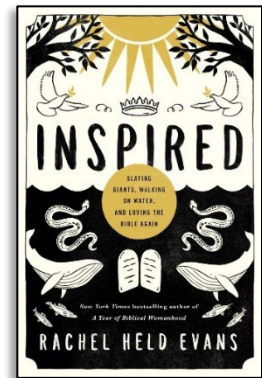
Books & Brown Bags Gets *Inspired*

Wednesday, January 8th, 15th, 22nd, and 29th

6:00 P.M. – 7:30 P.M.

Joe Gettys Room

Our B&BB group starts the year by going back to basics—digging deeply into the Bible and its riches. Their guide to this path is *Inspired: Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again*, written by New York Times best-selling author, Rachel Held Evans. Her website offers this overview of her thought-provoking work.



If the Bible isn't a science book, instruction manual, or position paper, then what is it? Evans invites readers on a journey of rediscovery as she explores the magic of the Bible, engaging the old, familiar stories in new ways that honor the past and enlighten the present.

Drawing upon recent scholarship and literary analysis, Evans creatively retells our favorite Bible stories, explaining their contexts and possible interpretations, and then connects these ancient stories to our present-day ones. ... Readers are invited to fall in love with Scripture all over again without checking their intellect—or their imaginations—at the door.

If you haven't yet sampled the Books & Brown Bags experience, this is a great time to jump in! Bring a light snack supper or snack and a beverage. You will be nourished in many ways by your participation.

End of Life

TAKING CARE WITH A FEW LAST THINGS
A SEVEN PART SERIES

January 16 Topic: Where is God at the End of Life?

Fellowship Hall

Doors open: 5:00 P.M.

Program begins: 5:30 P.M.

Note: Session does not include dinner

Westminster's End of Life series continues on January 16 with The Rev. Dr. Robert Todd leading our exploration of a tough question: Where is God at the end of life? According to Rev. Todd, "This will be a discussion of important things to consider as we approach our final days. We will consider such questions as sanctity of life, confidence in the promises of God, how our Christian faith impacts decisions of end-of-life care, and the most important question of 'Where is God at the end of the journey?'"



Bob Todd is uniquely qualified to facilitate this discussion, thanks to a long and varied career that encompasses his experiences as an M.D. combined with years of pastoral service as a Presbyterian minister. He is well-known as a strong advocate for palliative care as a source of support and dignity as death approaches. Bob is deeply committed to helping medical professionals wrestle with ethical issues, and serves on ethics committees (in addition to other roles) for both Self Regional Healthcare and Abbeville Area Medical Center. Conversations between Caroline and Bob ultimately led to creating this vitally important seminar series.

Westminster has orchestrated this multi-part series to meet the unique needs of older adults, for those who love and care for them, and for those who will someday be older adults. Taking care with a few last things brings peace to this season of life for those going through it and those who care for them. You are encouraged to share this invitation with your friends and family who have similar interests.

Future Topics

February 20: Walking Your Loved One Home

Dr. Nancy Hart Wicker, Medical Director of Hospice and Palliative Care of the Piedmont

March 20: Celebrating Life: Making Funeral Plans

Speaker to be determined

April 24: Caring for the Caregivers: Upper Savannah Council on Aging

*Aeriell Bowick, Family Caregiver Advocate
Christy Stroud, Medicare Counselor*

May 15: Good Grief

Speaker to be determined

Thank You for Helping Build the Body of Christ

A note from your Business Affairs Ministry Team, on behalf of the entire Session:

Sincere thanks to the many congregation members who responded to our annual Stewardship campaign. With most of the pledge cards returned, the **total committed for 2025 stands at more than \$225,000**, compared to \$197,000 pledged for 2024. More than 70% of WPC families submitted a commitment letter, and that includes 100% of Session members for 2024 and 2025.

Your Session has crafted a budget that strives to balance Westminster's call to mission, outreach, and growth with the business realities of maintaining our small staff and large, beautiful campus. Combining pledges with all our other sources of income, our approved budget actually projects a slight *positive* balance. Truly, God *has* provided, God *is* providing, and God *will* provide!

We are a small church with a BIG vision—your gifts of time, talent, and, yes, treasure are essential if we are to be the church we aspire to be.



New Year—New Session

On Sunday, January 19th, Westminster will ordain a new group of Ruling Elders. These hardy *and* hearty souls have agreed to accept the challenge of guiding the business of the church. Please keep these new leaders in your prayers all year: **Luke Christie** and **Bill Kimler**. Also lift up in prayer **Tina Corley, Rob Graves, Laine Horowitz**, and **Richard Wilson** as they continue serving with grace and skill. Finally, remember **Len Bornemann** and **Claire Kuhl**, who have been elected Treasurer and Clerk of Session respectively.

As Luke and Bill step up, **Kathy Felder** and **Claire Kuhl** step down to become Resting Elders. Please express your



gratitude to all of these Westminster shepherds who graciously give of their time and talents to keep our church home missionally focused and fiscally sound.

Party Time!



Best wishes and sincere prayers for these members and friends with January birthdays:

- ❖ 3rd – Emily Hughes
- ❖ 14th – Kathy Felder
- ❖ 15th – Carlisle McInnis Hobson
- ❖ 16th – Laine Horowitz
- ❖ 21st – Gary West
- ❖ 21st – Gemma Craven (Sholar family)
- ❖ 22nd – Kathleen Watkins

Congratulations are also in order for these loving couples celebrating their wedding anniversary:

If you forgot to send in your pledge card for 2025, it's not too late. And if you have not yet fulfilled your pledge for 2024, please consider making your gift as soon as possible.

❖ 1st – Kathy & Gary West

“Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.”

Luke 6:38

The Value of Building Interfaith Relationships

Excerpted from <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/worship/interfaith/>

Building strong interfaith relationships is a core commitment for Presbyterians. Jesus crossed all kinds of religious and cultural boundaries to build relationships of trust and love. We strive to follow his example in a religiously diverse world that seems to grow more divided every day.



Presbyterians are deeply aware of our inability to ever fully know or understand God, and we understand God to be capable of revealing God's self in all kinds of ways. As a result, we actively seek to build respectful and caring relationships with those of other religious traditions — and of *no* religious tradition — and we watch for ways to share the good news that has transformed our lives with others who may be seeking their own transformation.

Presbyterians believe that the growing religious diversity in the United States is an opportunity for Christians to demonstrate the love of Christ. Our task is to prepare our members to fully understand what makes our witness as Presbyterians distinctive, and to help our members reach across boundaries of religious differences to build relationships of trust with those who embrace or belong to other traditions, or to no tradition at all.

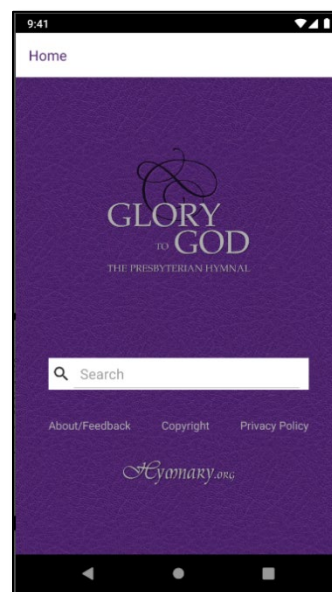
Is That a Hymnal in Your Pocket??

Imagine having the entire *Glory to God* hymnal in your pocket! It's a great tool for exploring this new hymnal that Westminster has recently adopted. Not sure about a hymn that you see listed in the ebulletin? Pop open your GTG app to see the words and music—there's even a button to click if you'd like to hear the melody.

The free app includes the pew version of all 235 of the public domain hymns in *Glory to God*. You can also purchase the entire pew version of the hymnal, with both public domain *and* copyrighted material, for \$19.99.

For each hymn, there is a page of information that may include a description of the hymn, a brief biography of the author or composer, and information for worship leaders such as performance suggestions and available arrangements. A brief audio clip is also available.

The search box allows you to search for hymns by first line, author, composer, topic, or scripture passages quoted or alluded to. You can also jump immediately to a hymn by number. Several indexes are available in the app menu.



You can download this app to your smartphone or tablet from the app store of your choice. Put a song in your heart and in your pocket!

Party Like It's 400 B.C.E.— BEMA Westminster Celebrates a Major Milestone!

Submitted by Luke Christie



BEMA Westminster is so excited! We finally reached the end of the Old Testament! Over the past 15 months, we have deepened our understanding of God's redeeming work throughout history by studying the scriptures from the Eastern perspective of God's earliest partners, the ancient Hebrew people. Guided by The BEMA Podcast, we wandered with the Israelites in the desert, wrestled with questions of idolatry and injustice, and welcomed new ideas about prophecy.

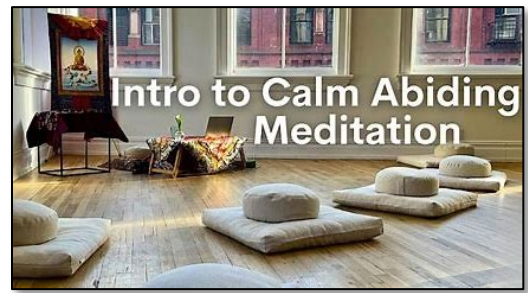
Full of new knowledge, we felt like the people who returned from the Babylonian exile with Nehemiah and Ezra. Nehemiah 8:1-12 recounts an occasion where Ezra read from the Law of Moses, and the people grew in understanding as they listened. Their response? "And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that had been declared to them" (Nehemiah 8:12).

So on December 16, BEMA Westminster gathered at the home of Luke, Gloria, and Brad Christie to eat, drink, and make great rejoicing—and now we send this portion to you, our extended family (*see photo on page 17*). We anticipate more growth and rejoicing as we journey through the gospels in 2025!

Meditation Group Returns!

Submitted by Ricky McCarson

Hello all! My name is Ricky McCarson. I am a friend of the Westminster Presbyterian Church. My wife Nicole, and daughters, Makenna and Aerabella, are actively involved at Westminster. We have been in Greenwood for four and half years. I am a United States Coast Guard Veteran and currently working as a GIS Specialist (Map Maker) at Greenwood CPW. I also happen to be a Celtic Buddhist Priest and a Certified Meditation Teacher. I was given this opportunity by Pastor Dennis to introduce you to the benefits of meditation and invite you all to attend the weekly group sessions that I host at the church and online!



Meditation is a practice used in nearly all spiritual traditions, including Christianity. It goes by many names and looks a little different depending on the lineage, but meditation is definitely a practice that belongs to all humans, regardless of their religious or ethnic background.

The type of meditation that I teach is called *Calm-Abiding*. This type of meditation comes from the Tibetan tradition of Buddhism. However, it is a practice that is suitable for anyone with a body and mind! This practice can blend nicely with any spiritual path or exist in a completely secular paradigm.

Calm-Abiding is a practice of focused attention used to connect with the sensations of the body and observe the movement of the mind. With time and effort, this leads to the

continued on page 12

Meditation, *continued from page 11*

development of concentration, awareness, and acceptance. Using these simple methods, we learn to recognize unhelpful or unwholesome thought patterns. Armed with these insights, we can actively transform these into wholesome mind-states.

Meditation has been proven to provide many mundane benefits. It is a great stress-reducer. Meditation calms the nervous system and can lead to better physical and mental health. It may help reduce anxiety and depression while increasing feelings of joy. Meditation can most definitely help with the cultivation of patience and lessen reactivity. Meditation is a tool that is now being used in corporations, universities, hospitals, correction facilities, and substance-use recovery centers.

**My mouth shall speak wisdom;
the meditation of my heart
shall be understanding.**

Psalm 49:3

People on a spiritual path, including Christians, may experience many additional benefits. Although not the goal, meditation has been reported to produce what most people would label as "spiritual experiences." One may experience an immense feeling of connection to the divine or a cosmic sense of oneness. People

have also reported dream-like visions. Meditative experiences are highly variable and personal. The most likely outcome is that you will become calmer and less reactive. The best thing to do is to go into meditation with no expectations at all. Let everything come and let

everything go! The practice teaches us not to attach to thoughts or sensations. We practice luminous presence and continuous letting go!

As you can see, there are tremendous benefits. However, one must exercise caution, as meditation can cause past trauma to resurface or can magnify troubling mind-states which can feel quite hellish. This can manifest as anything between slight agitation and extreme anxiety. This is why it is best to learn the practice in a safe and welcoming environment with a support system built in. That is what I am offering!

CHMC Schedule

All meetings held in the Fellowship Hall

Group Meditation:

- Tuesdays @ 6:00 P.M.
- Saturdays @ 10:00 A.M.

Interfaith Discussion:

- Third Tuesday @ 7:00 P.M.

I founded the Crazy Heart Meditation Community (CHMC) in order to bring people together from all backgrounds to experience the benefits of meditation and learn to cultivate basic virtuous behavior in a safe, family-like environment. I would be honored to have you join us! Our schedule is in the box above right. If you have any questions, you can reach me at threestreamsangha@gmail.com. You may also visit the website crazyhearts.org to learn more about the organization.

Note: These activities are hybrid, meaning they are in-person with an online/virtual option.

Holy One, give us courage to risk being church in new ways so that others might come to know your grace. Amen.

Dianne Loufman, M.Div.

Lead Pastor, First Lutheran Church, Duluth MN

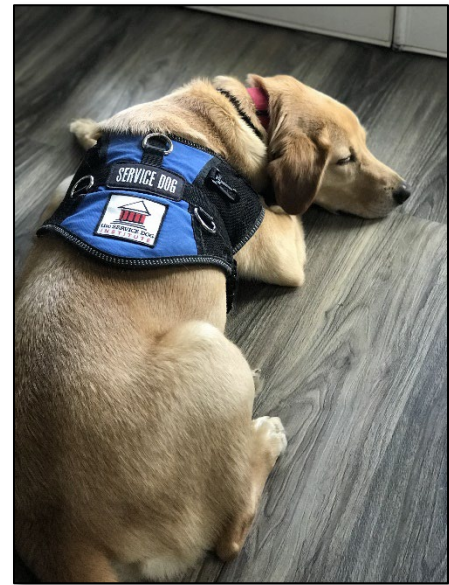


Check-Up for Church Members: WPC 2025 Challenge

The PC(USA) Book of Order is a critical part of our denomination's constitution, and it is a rich resource for churches seeking to enjoy God, follow Jesus, and grow disciples. As we launch our sailboat church into a new year, now is the perfect time to see how well you are doing in your unique ministry as a part of the Body of Christ. See page 18 for a list of the ways in which a "faithful member bears witness to God's love and grace" (PC(USA) Book of Order G-1.0304). You'll also find some challenge questions to help us continue to Build the Body of Christ at Westminster in the coming year.

New Year, New Dog – A Note from Luke Christie

Dear Westminster Family,
 Many of you know that I lost my beloved service dog, Oscar, last year to a liver disease. Some of you also know that a few months ago I began the process of getting a new dog through The Service Dog Institute (TSDI), a small nonprofit organization in Simpsonville that trains service dogs for a variety of special needs. Before the selection and training of my new dog could begin, I needed to raise at least half of the \$10,000+ cost of training and care.



I am thrilled to share the happy news that, thanks to friends near and far, I have now raised **ALL** the money needed. To those of you who knew about my fundraising efforts and donated, thank you! I am grateful beyond words for the support, fellowship, and love of my Westminster family!

Inquiring minds want to know:

- **What kind of dog will you be receiving?** At this point, I know only that my new companion will be a Labrador retriever; I don't know—and it doesn't matter to me one bit—what color or gender the dog will be.
- **Do you get to name the dog?** It depends. The dogs already in training have names. But I had the opportunity to provide a list of names I like. If TSDI determines that the best fit for my needs is to train a puppy from birth, then my future helper might have one of the names I provided.
- **When will you receive your dog?** The entire training process takes about a year. I will begin handler training six months after the dog's training begins. So, I estimate that match day—when I officially meet my new friend—will be this summer, followed by the pup's graduation and homecoming in late fall.

Thank you again for your encouragement, first as I grieved Oscar and now as I embark on this new chapter!

Yours in Christ,
Luke Christie

Stewardship Snapshot

The Stewardship Snapshot is a regular report from the Session to the *Westminster Times* newsletter. Please note that because of the newsletter publication schedule vs. timing of month-end close, these reports will typically be about six weeks behind.



November 2024

	November Actual	Monthly Budget	Year-to-Date Actual	Year-to-Date Budget
Total Income	\$26,972	\$17,938	\$217,023	\$197,316

Total Expenses <i>(includes Major Capital Expenditures)</i>	\$15,563	\$21,495	\$217,363	\$236,447
Net Gain/Loss	\$11,409		-\$340	

Member regular contributions for November were \$8,500 favorable to budget due to two full-year pledge contributions paid by members. Committee spending was in good control, and there were no minor or major capital expenditures.

Please direct any questions about church financial matters to Treasurer Len Bornemann or to the Business Affairs Committee.

Eight Habits of Evangelism

The PC(USA) *Book of Order* identifies “proclaiming the Good News in word and deed” as the first responsibility in the ministry of members of the Body of Christ (see page 18). But how do we do that effectively?

Evangelism has, for some of us, gotten a bad reputation—the province of fundamentalists bent on making sure you are “saved.” PC(USA) offers a resource called the Eight Habits of Evangelism to flesh out what it means for us Presbyterians to evangelize in today’s world.



In his preamble to the 8 Habits website (8habts.org), Ray G. Jones, Director of Theology, Formation, & Evangelism, states:

Evangelism in the 21st century North American context must be experienced as a journey of going deeper in our faith, relationships around us and God’s mission of rescue and reconciliation. This journey of faith engages formation habits that change our lives and the world around us. When we open ourselves to God’s love, justice and the people around us, we encounter the reconciliation of all things and the saving grace of Jesus. The beauty of this journey is that this transformation process always opens us to the wonder of God.

Here’s a look at the eight habits identified for evangelism today. Take time to pray and reflect on each area in terms of how the Good News is shared by our congregation.

- Worship
- Generosity
- Justice
- Radical welcome
- Sacraments
- Teaching
- Prayer
- Fellowship

Mental Health Benefits of Religion

Excerpted from The Mental Health Benefits of Religion & Spirituality | NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness

Religion gives people something to believe in, provides a sense of structure and typically offers a group of people to connect with over similar beliefs. These facets can have a large positive impact on mental health. Research suggests that religiosity reduces suicide rates, alcoholism and drug use. Here are some of religion’s main mental health benefits:



Community

- Initiates social connections with other members
- Creates a sense of belonging to a group
- Offers trustworthy and safe social engagement

Ritual

- Helps people to cope with difficult life situations (i.e., end-of-life ceremonies)
- Provides structure, regularity, and predictability
- Allows for time to rest as well as holidays and other special times of the year

Teachings

- Provides guidelines to live by (i.e., the importance of doing the right thing)
- Teaches compassion, forgiveness, and gratitude
- Identifies life lessons, even from challenging situations

As Christians who embrace inclusiveness, we have an opportunity to welcome and offer a safe space to people who have experienced religious trauma in their lives. While not yet an official diagnosis, religious trauma is recognized by many reputable psychotherapists as a source of emotional pain for people who have been harshly judged and ostracized by strict, authoritarian religious groups of many types. Westminster can help those who have experienced such rejection find the joy of faith and the mental health benefits it offers.



Almighty God,

Bind us closer in the midst of our differences. We pray that no child of yours will be discriminated against because of who they are. Give us a bigger vision and a wider embrace, lest we oppress others.

Create in us hearts wide enough to accept and love without discrimination as shown by your Son Jesus Christ.

In His name we pray, *Amen!*

Prayer by Cosme Haban, reprinted in Disciplines: A Book of Daily Devotions

Let Us Pray...

"Pray without ceasing"
1 Thessalonians 5:17



For Those in Our Church

We share one another's joys and concerns:

- John Bacot
- Mary Corley
- Larry Dozier
- Kathy Felder
- Lucia Horowitz
- Mac & Holly Hubbard
- Kelli Lott & Gabby
- Savanah & Briar Rose
- Dashe & Aaron Hoang
- Claire Kuhl
- Tim Mossman
- Kim Purcell
- Ed Watkins
- The Watkins Family
- Mary Anne Wilson
- Gail & Glenn Yonce, & Georgiana
- Our pastor & her family

We pray daily for our prayer partners and their special concerns. We pray for our sister churches: New Faith, Ware Shoals, First Presbyterian, Abbeville Presbyterian, and others.

We pray for the ministries of our church, especially:

- Presbyterian Communities of SC
- Prison Ministry
- Thornwell Home
- Presbyterian College
- NAMI
- Pathway House
- Food Bank
- Soup Kitchen
- Meg's House
- Beyond Abuse
- GG United Ministries
- Healthy Learners
- Camp Fellowship
- Community Initiatives
- Toddler Learning Center
- Trinity Presbytery



For Those in Our Hearts

We pray for members of our wider community (and our connection to them):

- Dan Blimline (*Mary Anne*)
- Jeff Crisp (*Hammonds*)
- The Cauley Family
- John Gettys
- Lib Grier (*many*)
- Frances Garrin (*Mary Anne*)
- Amy Jennings (*Denise*)
- Katherine Martin (*many*)
- Dabney Mahanes (*Denise*)
- Susy Mitchell (*many*)
- Amy Jennings (*Denise*)
- Patricia Lytle (*Beth*)
- Tarri McKinney (*Suzy*)
- Lillian Moneyhun (*many*)
- Cameron Murphy (*Sarah*)
- Richard Pinkney (*Len*)
- Meg Templin
- Heath & Peggy Rada (*Mary Anne*)



For the World

We pray for our neighbors everywhere who we are called to love:

- For peaceful transfer of power to the incoming U.S. Administration
- For those who have been affected by hurricanes and other natural disasters
- For peace in Ukraine and Russia, in Israel and Palestine, Syria, and elsewhere
- For all children, especially those who lack loving, stable homes
- For persons affected by domestic violence
- For justice and mercy to prevail throughout the world—*thy* will be done
- For those living with mental, emotional, and/or physical illnesses
- For all who experience exclusion, or who struggle to meet basic needs
- For unity among Christians in every congregation, country, and corner of the world

And God Saw That It was Good



Two MEGS House families received Christmas gifts from Westminster

Ministry of Members: G-1.0304

From the PC(USA) Book of Order 2023-2025

Membership in the Church of Jesus Christ is a joy and a privilege. It is also a commitment to participate in Christ's mission. A faithful member bears witness to God's love and grace and promises to be involved responsibly in the ministry of Christ's Church. Such involvement includes:

- † Proclaiming the Good News in word and deed;
- † Taking part in the common life and worship of a congregation;
- † Lifting one another up in prayer, mutual concern, and active support;
- † Studying Scripture and the issues of Christian faith and life;
- † Supporting the ministry of the church through the giving of money, time, and talents;
- † Demonstrating a new quality of life within and through the church;
- † Responding to God's activity in the world through service to others;
- † Living responsibly in the personal, family, vocational, political, cultural, and social relationships of life;
- † Working in the world for peace, justice, freedom, and human fulfillment;
- † Caring for God's creation;
- † Participating in the governing responsibilities of the church; and
- † Reviewing and evaluating regularly the integrity of one's membership, and considering ways in which one's participation in the worship and service of the church may be increased and made more meaningful.



2025 Westminster Member Ministry Challenge



- Which of these do you do regularly? Daily/weekly/monthly?
 - Which ones bring you the most joy?
- Which ones need more attention? What is your personal commitment for growth?
 - Which ones do you regularly engage in with your children or grandchildren?
- How will you support the other members of our Westminster family in making these an integral part of our individual and corporate life?
- In 2025, how will you help Westminster enjoy God, follow Jesus, and grow disciples?



FEAST AND FELLOWSHIP

**FIRST TUESDAY OF THE MONTH
AT NOON**

 **fellowship**
CAMP & CONFERENCE CENTER

**COME ENJOY
A TASTY MEAL
FOR \$10 AND
FELLOWSHIP
WITH YOUR
COMMUNITY!**

**457 CAMP FELLOWSHIP ROAD
WATERLOO, SC 29384**

Feast and Fellowship! Happy New Year Community Luncheon!

Tuesday, January 7, 2025

12:00 PM - 2:00 PM

Fellowship Camp & Conference Center
457 Camp Fellowship Road
Waterloo, SC, 29384

Coloring Page for All God's Children



Baby Jesus is presented at the temple in Jerusalem