

Westminster Presbyterian Church

Creatively sharing Christ's love: we welcome, we serve, we grow



Mission Study 2019

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Introduction and History

Westminster Presbyterian Church arose in the mid 1950's during a period of denominational growth. Boulder Knoll, as the property is known, is a heavily wooded 5.87-acre parcel in south Salem. The beautiful natural setting is appropriate for a church community that throughout its history cherishes the wonder of God's creation and seeks to steward that gift.

The organizing pastor, Dwight Russell, did extraordinary work canvassing and establishing relationships in all the neighborhoods south of Mission Street. The fruit of those efforts alongside the early congregants resulted in a charter member roll of 215 in February of 1957. The community-building spirit infused the early members and continues to this day.

The people of Westminster have consistently sought to act both locally and globally. Support for refugee families, hailing from places such as Indonesia and Laos, has gone on from inception to present. In the current era of dire situations around the globe, our church supports Salem for Refugees, and acts with local organizations to walk alongside the displaced and vulnerable. Another example of local collaborative mission effort is the Salem Interfaith Hospitality Network hosting and providing support for homeless families. Additionally, we have had representation on our School Board for 18 years, and have recently had a member on the Salem City Council.

There is a deep appreciation of the arts at Westminster. While the original sanctuary was under construction, the first organist and music director, Mary and Wally Johnson, began playing out of the back of the truck on the manse lawn. They built strong and varied music programs over the ensuing decades. Today, we enjoy quality traditional and contemporary music in services led by professional music educators. Home grown gifts in the dramatic arts and liturgical dance have also been employed to enhance worship. For the past 32 years, Westminster has hosted an annual Festival of Fine Arts. This fine arts weekend has grown to be a juried, highly respected regional art show attracting a broad swath of the local arts community and supporting youth with scholarships.

The original A-frame sanctuary with attached education wing has been expanded significantly in the decades following organization. In 1987, a new sanctuary was dedicated incorporating faith-inspired design themes from natural materials created by artist and pastor, Rev. Roy Setziol. Our congregation has a long-standing relationship as the Charter Organization for local Boy Scout Troop 108, and now hosts a beautiful scout lodge on site to mutual blessing. The most recent infrastructure project is Boulder Hall, the culmination of a 2010 capital campaign driven by the need for a more versatile multipurpose space.

Westminster has always been a place where attendees cherish our life in worship, and exploring spiritual growth opportunities is encouraged. We have been blessed by approachable pastors, including our recently retired pastor, Rev. John Moody, who served 23 years! Scripture is brought alive when it is made relevant in today's culture and translates to faith-inspired behavior. Numerous retired pastors have been part of our church through the years. Our congregation has strong traditions of inclusivity and participatory role models.

Our setting in a forest inspires us. However, being God's people is more than buildings or beautiful nature. In contrast to the era in which this church began, PCUSA and other mainline Protestant denominations often struggle to address the issue of cultural relevancy in today's world. In response to this challenge, the Session of Westminster, initiated a process of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) in 2014. The AI work has been instrumental in guiding us during this time of transition.

Appreciative Inquiry Process

As our pastor passed his 20th year with us, Session saw that we were also facing eventual pastoral change and so began to evaluate long range planning strategies, finally settling on AI, as the technique has been utilized in both secular and religious organizations to examine positive core attributes. The results of the process are used to guide actions and decision making in a forward-looking manner. The program is divided into several distinct phases.

An initial AI core team was appointed, followed by a series of meetings, leading to the finalization of the relevant questions for the interviews. Led by a consultant, a retreat was held for church leaders to be introduced to the upcoming AI interview procedures. Participants were given the opportunity to conduct mock interviews in order to practice. The congregation was then notified of the process, given explanation of the intent, invited to participate, and subsequently contacted directly by team members. Eventually, we received 110 completed surveys from predominantly in-person interviews with a subset choosing the written option. This level of response is considered to be statistically significant.

Analysis of responses was an arduous process that began with a volunteer led effort to digitize and categorize member observations, comments, and sentiments. Again, church leadership held retreats to evaluate the data obtained. Session eventually designated an 8-member team to lead the next stage of the process, which included evaluating and then communicating the results. Common themes were identified in preparation for sharing the information with the congregation. The results confirmed that we celebrate our welcoming, non-judgmental life together, and rejoice in unity among diversity. We honor and celebrate our call to service in our community and in the world. The findings confirmed our love for the arts, and our desire for spiritual growth opportunities together. Importantly, willingness to change with the times was also a frequently expressed sentiment.

Given Westminster's setting in a forested campus, tree imagery was chosen to give life to the narration. The roots symbolize church history, the trunk stands for who we are and what makes us strong, branches represent our core values, and leaves illustrate future hopes and dreams. The findings were published, distributed, and presented to the congregation over a 5-week period, with each section of the report briefly summarized in worship. A more comprehensive presentation was conducted in the form of Sunday morning sessions. The culmination coincided with a 2017 unity service and party celebrating Westminster's 60th anniversary.

The next phase involved envisioning potential avenues to turn identified congregational aspirations into concrete ministry goals. Common desires included: attracting and

retaining young people and families, increasing our community outreach, and continuing to expand spiritual growth opportunities for all ages. A strategic plan could include reaching out to Salem Leadership Foundation, a local faith-based non-profit that partners with local churches to provide seed funding to jump start programs serving the community. The team also interviewed a city council member who attends Westminster to assess municipal views of neighborhood needs in south Salem. These types of endeavors provide source material for the final phase of the AI process, strategic planning.

In the spring of 2018 Session appointed a new 10-member committee (two carried forward from the prior phase) to translate the AI work into action. The charge was to develop implementation strategies for dreams arising from the AI process. As this stage began, our pastor, Rev. John Moody and his wife, Director of Christian Education Gail Moody, announced their intention to retire effective the end of 2018. During the transition to bridge and interim pastoral leadership, the new AI team struggled with defining their charge during this period of introspection. Eventually, under the mentorship and guidance of Transitional Pastor Rev. Lorne Bostwick, it was proposed that this AI team utilize the resources they had gathered to serve the congregation in the mission study process. Session easily approved the new mandate of the committee. While our mission direction and values are clear, the final phase of strategic planning remains to be done with a new pastor.

Mission Study/Values

The Mission Study committee carefully reviewed the AI findings looking for values that have shaped the mission and life of the Westminster family since its beginnings in 1957. Several themes emerged. Just as no individual's essence can be captured in a few words, no church body is adequately addressed in written language. However, we focused on four categories to express the core of Westminster values: **Compassion, Connection, Cultivation, and Creativity**. We then held a series of small congregational groups with approximately 80 volunteer participants to solicit feedback on this document, and changes were made.

Compassion

We treasure our reputation as a warm and welcoming congregation. We have a heart for service. Westminster focuses on outreach to visitors and new members. Effort is made to impact community needs through local action to support refugees, the homeless, and other vulnerable groups.

Connection

Westminster values **Connection** among members and regular attendees with a strong caring ministry led by Deacons and an active Stephen Ministry, regular expression of joys and concerns in worship, fellowship events that bring members together, and an email prayer list that allows rapid response to congregational requests. All the above contributes to the feeling of community at Westminster.

Cultivation

Christian growth through a strong educational program is central to the life of Westminster. Spiritual growth opportunities include several weekly Bible study offerings, children's education programs, fall and Lenten Sunday evening enrichment course offerings, and Sunday morning education sessions on topics of interest to members. All of this complements the liturgical schedule within worship services.

Creativity

Throughout our history, we have celebrated God's gift of creativity. For 33 years we have had a Festival of Fine Arts. Our sanctuary incorporates liturgical art. We enjoy quality music leadership in all of our worship. We cherish the beauty of God's creation when we come to church.

Programs

We have elected to discuss church programs and committees through the lens of the above values. We recognize that most, if not all, programs embody multiple values. However, since values guide actions, it seems appropriate to review them in this framework.

Compassion

Deacons have supported the church throughout Westminster's existence. Presently, we have 18 care groups with each headed by a Deacon, who shepherds about 20-25 members. In addition to keeping track of the needs of their Care Group members, Deacons provide support for memorial services and serve communion to the homebound. Stephen Ministry provides one-to-one confidential caring to those needing listening support and comfort. The Mission, Peace, Eco-Justice committee is a large and very active committee. They strive to serve, support, advocate, and inspire our local church to take action to provide God's peace and justice and protect God's creation. Mission funds are directed toward local, national, and international causes in support of these goals. Youth mission experiences have taken Westminster high school youth to places such as Chiapas (in southern Mexico,) Romania, New Orleans, and Puerto Rico over the years. The congregation has generously provided scholarships to help offset expenses and expand access. Members are very active in local organizations such as Salem for Refugees (including hosting a regular Refugee Supper Club), Marion Polk Food Share, and Table of Plenty, and hosting Interfaith Hospitality Network quarterly.

Connection

Worship is central to coming together as God's people to pray, reflect, praise, and receive God's word. Fifth Sundays and several other designated Sundays bring our three services together in a single blended service expressing the value of our unity. The Outreach committee welcomes and seeks to integrate people into the life of the church. The Fellowship committee provides opportunities to better know our neighbors through coffee and refreshment between services, hosting the annual picnic, and organizing "Dinners for Eight". Both women and men have monthly fellowship groups at local restaurants. Small groups (Clippers) have also been part of the fabric of the congregation. The Family Ministry committee seeks to support families and inter-generational interaction with programs such as "Parents' Night Out". Communication systems are critical and ever evolving in today's world. In addition to the church newsletter named "Boulder Knoll Scroll", we utilize Email-Blast, Prayer Chain, a recently re-worked web page, and multiple Facebook pages and groups to communicate

with the congregation and our neighbors. Technology services will need to continue to adapt to changing communication needs.

Cultivation

Children's Ministry provides the foundation of our education system serving preschool through 5th grade children. Vacation Bible School, Advent Craft Event, and Christmas Pageant all enjoy volunteer support from a broad base of the congregation. Youth ministry offers a variety of faith development experiences for mid and senior high kids. Highlights include the City Camp experience for middle schoolers, which provides hands-on, make-a-difference, summer service experiences, and the senior high youth mission trips discussed earlier. Adult faith explorations include various Bible studies, Sunday morning forums covering a variety of subjects from treatment of immigrant families at the border, to art history. Twice yearly multi-week Sunday evening series provide opportunities for a deeper faith dive in smaller group settings following a soup dinner. Westminster has benefitted from established relationships with regional universities whose faculties have blessed us repeatedly by sharing their expertise on a wide range of faith relevant topics. We have ongoing relationships with missionaries in Romania, Peru and the Middle East. The library acts as a resource with a large variety of materials. An annual women's retreat is a highlight for many in the church. Going forward, it will be increasingly important to continue to build bridges to a broader community.

Creativity

Our annual Festival of Fine Arts is a relatively unique event with 77 local and regional artists participating in 2019. Both established and emerging artists exhibit their work promoting bonds between the congregation and arts community. Mentorship and opportunity for children to display artwork, as well as scholarships are some of the tangible benefits. Seventy percent of the sales from the festival are returned to the artists with the remainder of the funds available for church use for items such as youth missions, and the building fund. Our commitment to the arts includes the strong music program previously discussed including both adult and children's choirs and bell choirs, special music in many services, and a praise team leading contemporary worship.

The Buildings and Grounds committee has a strong tradition at Westminster of caring for both the created natural world on the property and the man-made structures that together help to provide fertile soil for our faith to grow. Westminster is the Charter Organization for Boy Scout Troop 108 and Cub Scout Pack 122, who occupy a beautiful lodge on the western portion of the property. Troop 108 holds their Court of Honor ceremonies in the church, and helps with the annual grounds cleanup. We also support Girl Scouts with building use. These groups are an extension of the youth community outreach.

Challenges

Through the small congregational feedback groups, we learned that our church values being challenged. In each of the core values, we recognize that there are opportunities for growth. Many of the challenges can best be addressed with future strategic planning in partnership with our new pastor.

Stewardship

For a church to successfully deliver programs and fulfill its mission, it must have a solid and sustainable financial foundation. Like other churches, Westminster has had revenue fluctuations and challenges, but it has found ways to fulfill these needs and prosper over time. Over the past ten years, several trends are clear. Westminster's congregation has a stellar record of fulfilling its pledge commitments. The following are some additional trends and examples of Westminster's Stewardship.

Operating Budget

The average church budget over the past ten years is over \$600,000. An average of 80 percent of revenue has come from member annual pledges, although there has been a slight decline in the last four years. The percent of budget expenses for personnel has varied from a high of 74 percent to a low of 65 percent. Changing part-time positions to full time and having an associate pastor until 2013 presented some budgetary challenges, which in some years, were addressed by reducing Presbytery Mission giving. While the number of pledges has slowly declined over time, some of this decline has been offset by rising Identifiable Loose Offerings which have grown to approximately 8 per cent of revenues.

Asset Management

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The Westminster campus consists of the expanded church building, an adjacent house that provides supplemental office space, and a Boy Scout Building expanded by Troop 108's donations, all located on 5.87 acres of land in a natural setting. The congregation has invested 2.9 million dollars in developing the campus. In addition to expanding and upgrading the facility in 1988 and again in 2010, Westminster has continued to make facility upgrades, replaced equipment and addressed building maintenance needs. Currently, the church does not have a deferred maintenance problem.

Reserves

Westminster maintains a Building Reserve Fund for unbudgeted facility needs, with a current balance of over \$24,000. General Memorials have a balance of nearly \$16,000, and the account for debt reduction contains nearly \$80,000. While Westminster historically has not maintained a specific reserve fund, an effort is currently underway to set aside an equivalent of 3 months of operating expenses for this purpose.

Debt

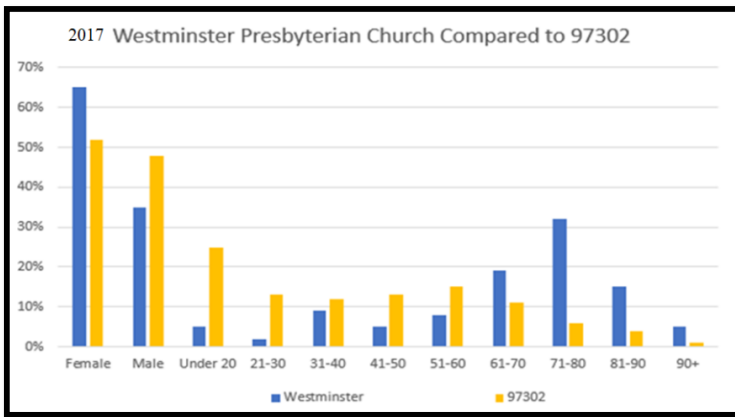
After securing a Synod Line-of-Credit during construction of the expanded facility, Westminster obtained a five-year amortized loan on the then outstanding balance of \$1 million in 2013. A second five-year loan was obtained in 2018, which reduced loan payments to approximately \$6,000 per month. The current outstanding loan balance is approximately \$500,000. A renewal of the loan will be required in 2023. Westminster is currently conducting another 4-year building debt reduction campaign that should raise sufficient pledges to cover debt payments for the next four years.

Challenges

2018 brought significant staff transitions. The long-serving Pastor, Christian Education Director, Facility Manger, and Music Director all retired. This level of transition presents both opportunities to approach staffing and programs in some new ways, offers challenges for continuing or expanding church programs within Westminster's budgetary means. The church has an aging congregation with a declining number of pledges. The current stewardship campaign is targeting reversing that trend. Westminster has about \$46,000 of Endowments, but is undertaking an effort to increase endowments as another source of income for mission.

Demographics

Westminster is a congregation of 463 members with another 70 families or individuals who are regular attenders. Looking at the past quarter century, membership has decreased 19% relative to peak membership. Relocation or death accounts for the largest share of the decline. Although the church has had a majority of older members for 30 years, there has been a further shift towards an older congregation. The surrounding community (zip code 97302) is similar to Westminster with female predominance and majority white. Westminster is 99% white, compared to 82% in the 97302. The balance of the surrounding community is 10% Hispanic, 5% Pacific Islander/Native American, 2% Asian, and 1% Black. Sixty percent of our members live within 5 miles of the church. Income levels for the surrounding community show greater than 30% of households earning an annual income of \$100,000 dollars or more. Westminster does not keep data on member income or occupation. Mission Insite reports that approximately 35% of the vicinity reports Christian programs as moderately important with 15% reporting them as very important. In summary, despite an aging trend, the general make-up of the congregation has remained relatively stable over the last several decades. We remain less diverse than the surrounding community. Like many PCUSA churches, we have work to do to increase our racial and ethnic diversity and attract young families.



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Pastoral Leadership

Westminster has had only six pastors, with our most recent pastor serving for 23 years. In this section, our intent is to characterize our most recent pastoral leadership. It is not within the scope of this document to project the qualities of the pastor we seek. That will be the work of our Pastor Nominating Committee. Since many members have only known our last pastor, a discussion of leadership will focus on his style and strengths. Rev. John Moody came to Westminster in his early 40's as an experienced pastor of a congregation of similar size to Westminster. He was selected for his approachable style. His leadership in the church in general, and in worship specifically, was relational. His preaching style was narrative, weaving stories from contemporary experience with the Biblical passages, bringing a message of relevance for today. He evolved into speaking without notes in a manner that was more conversational. As a leader, John was warm and welcoming. During John's tenure, Westminster grew in its reputation as a welcoming place and maintained its focus on service and the arts. John was active in the community in both civic and ecumenical ways which benefited the congregation.

Concluding Thoughts

God has richly blessed this congregation! With great blessing comes great responsibility. At this time of transition, we take stock of the many gifts we have been given. Our warm and welcoming ways can open new pathways to share God's love with a broader community. Although we are not a diverse congregation in some ways, we are diverse in others. Our non-judgmental ways will allow us to respect the rights, differences, and dignity of others. That respect will open the doors to building new and diverse relationships. Our heart for service will continue to take us into the community and world around us. We will continue to look for ways to walk alongside the vulnerable, building bridges of care. It will be vital in the years ahead to interface with the community around us. If we seek to be a respected voice with regard to the many challenging social issues that face our society, it will require working collaboratively with secular and religious institutions. Westminster has a tradition of open-mindedness and humility which will be useful if we hope to have a greater role in the community. Our love for the arts and for the beauty of creation are two assets which we should continue to share and celebrate with others. These passions demonstrate the types of opportunities we have to connect with a broader audience. As we prayerfully look

ahead to the installation of our next pastor, we should be mindful of traits which will be required for successful pastoral leadership going forward including: relational yet forthright, adaptable, appreciation of both the arts and the beauty of nature, and finally, the ability to inspire and challenge us by reflecting Christ's love. May God's hand be upon this process, and may we, the Westminster church body, reflect the glory of Christ to the world around us. Amen.