



Westminster Chimes

Coming in to be nurtured, going out to serve

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Remembering Margi Brown

A year ago on Labor Day weekend, Westminster lost a dear friend, Margi Brown. Many people asked if something could be done at Westminster to honor her legacy here. In response, the Worship and Music Committee has commissioned new "Gifts of the Spirit" banners, created by Caroline Greger and Karen Karn, that will be dedicated to her legacy during the 10:30 a.m. communion service on Sunday, September 6, 2026, during worship in the sanctuary.



After worship that day, during fellowship time (about 11:30 a.m.) in the Great Hall, the Worship and Music Committee and the Racial Justice Working Group will host a reception to honor Margi. Cake will be served, and cards will be available for people to write messages about their memories of Margi that will be shared with her family. If you wish to write a note to Margi's family but won't be able to attend the reception, contact Caroline Greger. (Contact the church office at info@westprespdx.org if you need Caroline's e-mail.)

Many people in the church community knew Margi, but they may not have realized just how many aspects of congregational life interested her. She had a wealth of knowledge about the PC(USA) and Presbytery, and she was also a Christian educator. She channeled all that knowledge and experience into action that made a difference in how effectively Westminster fulfilled its mission and outreach to the community and the greater world.

Margi joined Westminster in 1994 and was involved in countless ways over the years—as a deacon, as an elder, as a trustee, as a committee member, and so much more. Caroline Greger, chair for the Worship and Music Committee, explained, "Margi expressed her faith by serving wherever there was a need. She could be counted on to step up to usher; to be an active committee member; to organize, prepare, and serve communion; and to help wherever help was needed. She had a passion for justice and was a member of the Racial Justice Working Group at the time of her death. As a past chair of the Worship and Music Committee, she continued that work until the last with a fine attention to detail and Presbyterian polity. Margi was institutional memory in human form and could be depended upon to answer any question about how things are done. She was a true disciple and is greatly missed."

Continued on next page

Margi was also an enthusiastic organizer and participant for many years of annual retreats. Former Westminster pastor Laurie Newman shared, "One thing stands out to me, and that was her love of our annual Women's Retreat. She was key to making it a success. She loved working with other women to plan. She always took charge of registration, and she loved at the retreat when we did group singing and dancing. She also loved the All-Church Retreat at the coast. She and Don brought their grandkids for years. There's so much more. But I remember her happy in this."

One area where Margi particularly shined was in her support of Westminster worship services. Director of Music Ministries Debbie Glaze remembered, "Her tenure on the Worship and Music Committee was legendary, as was her knowledge of all things necessary for creating fulfilling worship services—communion setup, serving, and cleanup; banner management through all seasons; and ushering, just to name a few. Margi was always interested in what the choir was doing: she told me she loved setting up for communion because she got to hear the choir warm up and rehearse, and she always gifted us with a warm smile as she traversed the choir loft. She appreciated and verbally supported the music program throughout my 15 years that I worked with her, which was a steady and most appreciated gift of herself. Her life, her heart, and her spirit were here, and she is greatly missed."

Please join us on September 6th to remember and honor this remarkable woman.

Dog Days of Summer

You're invited to "Dog Days of Summer," or as the kids call it, "Hot Dog Day"! On Sunday, August 9th, following worship (about 11:30 a.m.), join us for an outdoor fellowship time, where we will enjoy grilled hot dogs, chips, drinks, and more! We'll have vegetarian and gluten-free options, too. There's no need to RSVP for this fun, free event; simply stop by and join in! If you're available to volunteer at this event, please contact Jason Houser or the church office. We hope to see you there!



You're Invited to a Covenant Conversation!

On Saturday, August 29, from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Westminster will host a Covenant Conversation titled "When Did We See You? Recognizing God's Image in All God's People." The day includes discussion, workshops, worship, and lunch. Registration is \$25, though discounts are available. This event is presented by the Covenant Network of Presbyterians (an organization seeking equity for LGBTQIA+ people in church and society) in partnership with leaders and congregations of the Cascades Presbytery and the Synod of the Pacific. To register or for more information, visit: <https://www.covnetpres.org/events/cascades>



Pastor's Column

This month, our Pastor's Column is being guest authored by Westminster member Avery Clark, a Presbytery of the Cascades Young Adult Advisory Delegate who provides his report on the PC(USA) General Assembly.

The 227th General Assembly (2026) was full of accomplishment, struggle, and deep-fried cheese curds. After three days of committee meetings on Zoom, the commissioners and advisory delegates traveled to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, for a week of community building and collective discernment with the whole body during plenary. There were a number of significant achievements by this General Assembly, including: committing to divesting from fossil fuels by 2030; divesting from GE-Aerospace and Palantir for human rights violations; making ordination processes more equitable and accessible; creating an ethical framework for AI emphasizing caution, transparency, and accountability; beginning development of a comprehensive theological framework addressing gender, human sexuality, and relationships; repudiating Christian Nationalism; calling for accountability and transparency from ICE and condemning their practices of mass deportation and family separation; condemning Israel's war in Gaza as a genocide; and, with much celebration, formally deciding to hold the next General Assembly in Puerto Rico.

However, all of those successes did come with some struggles. One overriding concern this General Assembly was distrust toward and abuses of institutional power. The recent restructuring of the PC(USA) world mission came with its share of challenges, which left many employees silenced and feeling that the executives had stepped out of line in their decision-making. This led to two significant overtures being passed by the General Assembly: the first one, approved by an overwhelming majority, was the prohibition of non-disclosure covenants which suppressed speech around the restructuring of the world mission. The second, also passed by a large majority, created a commission to investigate the decisions made by the A Corp, Unification Commission, Presbyterian Life and Witness, and the stated clerk, and to make recommendations for the discipline and/or terminations of staff at its discretion. In the closing sermon of the assembly, the Reverend Laura Mariko Cheifetz called out the issue, saying, "Quoting Scripture while mistreating your employees will not make you righteous."

Another looming concern at the assembly, especially on the minds of the Young Adult Advisory Delegates (YAADs), was the presence of the Presbyterians for the Kingdom (dubbed "the suits" by the YAADs). Presbyterians for the Kingdom (PftK) is an organization of mostly young adults who wear suits to hide their insecurities and who are committed to pushing the PC(USA) in a theologically and socially conservative direction. A few YAADs were part of PftK, but the majority held them in disdain and some reported discrimination and harassment from PftK members—especially toward women and queer people. They are avowedly homophobic but disguise it with language of "tradition" and "orthodoxy," knowing that their beliefs are unpopular within the PC(USA), or with young adults in general, and emphasize "unity" while holding that some people should not be allowed to partake in Christ's communion. At the moment, PftK's influence is largely relegated to a corner of the Internet, but nonetheless beware of wolves in sheep's clothing.



Sustaining Westminster as a Beacon of God's Light

On June 23rd, the Finance & Administration Committee hosted a retreat for members of its Budget and Stewardship Subcommittees, as well as representatives of Trustees and the Personnel Committee. Some of those present also served on the Vision and Strategy Task Force. The focus was on Westminster's financial picture over the next few years. With help from Sandra Moon and Heidi Bolt of the Presbyterian Foundation, we reviewed and discussed several observations:

- Westminster is much healthier financially and in terms of participation than most Presbyterian and other Christian churches in the United States.
- We are nevertheless facing the same headwinds as other churches: the eventual passing of the generous baby boomers (and their elders), who currently supply 85% of pledges and dollars pledged.
- It is imperative that Westminster make changes to adapt over the next several years.

We began a lively discussion, sharing ideas for using our strengths to ensure that we will continue to share God's love for each other and our community in the future. In the words of the Vision and Strategy Task Force, we aim to be "Beacons of light, steadfast, enduring, available to all."

As dialogue continues, Westminster's leaders will share their discussions with the congregation and welcome questions and suggestions. Please contact us at SustainingWestminster@westprespdx.org.

On behalf of Finance & Administration,
Anne Stevenson, Co-Chair
Gregg Neel, Head of Staff

Save the Date for Our Fall Congregational Meeting

The Session has called a special congregational meeting on Sunday, September 27, 2026, to be held immediately after 10:30 a.m. worship (about 11:30 a.m.) in the sanctuary to elect new church officers. All members are encouraged to attend this brief meeting and vote.

Save the Date for the Women's Retreat!

Save the date of Saturday, September 26, for the 2026 Westminster Women's Retreat! Our guest speaker will be Claire K. McKeever-Burgett, an author, feminist theologian, creative contemplative, and spiritual leader who has devoted her life to bridging spirituality and social justice. She is the author of *Blessed Are the Women: Naming and Reclaiming Women's Stories from the Gospels* and *In the Beginning Were the Women: Matriarchs, Mystics, Wise Women, and Warriors in the Hebrew Bible*. This retreat, titled "Blessed Are the Women," will be held at the church. Registration will open on August 31.



Meet Your Elders - Jason Houser, Class of 2027

In this column, we'll introduce you to the elders who serve on Westminster's Session. If you're a Westminster member who might be interested in being an elder, contact the Reverend Gregg Neel for more information (gneel@westprespdx.org).

Which committee do you serve on, and what do you do with them?

I am the current chairperson of the Congregational Life Committee—or, as I like to call it, the "Official Party Committee." Our ultimate goal is creating opportunities for fellowship, engagement, and outreach. We help organize the fellowship time after Sunday worship and host some of our favorite seasonal traditions, like Ice Cream Sunday, the Dog Days of Summer, and New Year's Tamale Sunday. We also help facilitate new member classes, doing everything we can to make sure everyone feels instantly welcomed and woven into the fabric of Westminster.



One of the most exciting parts of our work is getting to innovate. For example, we recently revamped the fellowship format to make it easy for anyone to host—whether it's a big group of friends, a small family, or even a couple. Also, this summer, we're trying something brand new by moving some of the fellowship times outside onto the terrace right in front of the big red doors. We want the whole neighborhood to see just how fun and vibrant our community is! It makes it so easy to invite neighbors out on their Sunday stroll to stop by for a cup of coffee or a cookie. As with everything we do, it's all about extending that loving "Westminster Welcome." If you'd like to get more involved, volunteer at an event, or host a fellowship hour, please let me know. And if you have your own creative ideas for spreading love and acceptance to our local community, let's chat!

How long have you been active at Westminster?

My husband, Greg, and I have been attending Westminster for eight years. You might recognize us as the couple running the monthly parking lot food drive or perhaps as the two goofy bakers behind the annual Christmas Cookie Exchange. When we first showed up in 2018, we were running our own little cheesecake business. Naturally, one of the first things we did to make a sweet first impression was host fellowship time and serve mini cheesecake cups to the entire congregation. It turns out the old saying is true: if you want to make friends fast, always bring sweets!

Westminster has held our hearts ever since. In March of 2020, when it was announced during worship that Greg and I were engaged, the whole church erupted into cheers. It was a beautiful confirmation of what we already knew: this community truly loves and celebrates everyone. Then, in May of 2022, Greg and I had the profound honor of becoming the first-ever gay couple to be married in the beautiful Westminster sanctuary. We intentionally invited many of our LGBTQ+ friends who had been hurt or shunned by churches in the past. We wanted them to see firsthand how healing it can be to belong to a congregation that authentically affirms you exactly as God made you. Surrounded by family, friends, and our fellow members, it was hands-down the happiest day of our lives.

How do you like to spend your free time?

Over the last couple of years, Greg and I have committed to walking about five miles every day. It's a wonderful way to burn some calories while enjoying deep, uninterrupted conversation. We also love going on hikes, which involves significantly less conversation and a whole lot more gasping for air. (If you haven't hiked the "Trail of Ten Falls" at Silver Falls State Park yet, put it on your bucket list immediately!)

When we aren't out on the trails, we are busy making the most of Portland's world-class food and music scene. You can often find us enjoying a great dinner and a bottle of wine while listening to live jazz and blues at spots like Clyde's, Arrivederci, or Jo Bar. Now that I think about it, our hobbies are in direct conflict with each other: we burn off calories on a grueling hike, only to immediately put them right back on with great food and wine. Oh well—it's called balance, right?

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Session Action in July

In its July 2026 meeting, the Session:

- Voted to take Avery Clark under care as an inquirer for ministry. He starts at Princeton Seminary in the fall.
- Heard about some interesting changes for stewardship by the Finance and Administration Committee for 2027.
- Approved the recommendation from the trustees that undesignated bequests be divided with 50% going to the Forever Fund and 50% to the Emergency Reserve Fund beginning with the Kay Tousley bequest of \$21,250.
- Voted unanimously to give Jonathan Dyer, Director of Church Operations, a 6.5%, one-time salary bonus (\$3,900) for his work as Acting Head of Staff while Gregg Neel was on sabbatical and family leave.
- Voted to move resources so that the Odiorne Scholarship Committee could have \$14,000 available for seven approved scholarship applicants.

Legacy Giving

Westminster gives thanks for the life of Kay Tousley and her recent undesignated bequest from her estate of \$21,250. If you are interested in learning more about leaving a gift to Westminster, please contact the Rev. Gregg Neel at gneel@westprespdx.org.

August Birthdays



We rejoice with those members, friends of our congregation, and staff who celebrate birthdays in August:

8/1	Jane Dehaan, Char Marsh	8/19	Carmen Vetter, Julie Richard-Schutrop, Don Ballinger
8/2	Ryan Roser	8/20	Don Otto, Burton Simmons
8/3	Mariette Boyce, Gabrielle Boling, Katie Zeal	8/21	Mackenzie Fedota, Lynn Smith
8/6	Cari Olmsted	8/22	Denise Hudson, Corey Grice
8/7	Kim Hoeveler, George Gilley	8/23	Gretchen Nelson, Chris Jones, Carolyn Birt
8/8	Diedre Cain	8/24	Eli Karn, Larry Magura
8/9	Linda Dinan, Carol Turner	8/25	Scott Minor, Gregg Neel
8/10	David Lindsey, Steve Simmons, Kira Atwood-Youngstrom, Lori Martin	8/26	Peggy Miller
8/11	Liz Oliver, Michael Curtis	8/27	Jane Walgren
8/14	Ann Hall	8/28	Burt Reif, Allison Higgins, Judy Head
8/15	Bryce Strang, Katy Riker, Oliver Chapin	8/29	Kyle Cook, Nolan Ramirez, Kris Sclafani, Calvin Bash
8/17	Carrie Senn	8/30	Fred Bridges
8/18	Brock O'Quinn, Becky Brown	8/31	KayT Garrett

What's something people probably don't know about you?

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For ten years, I was a singer and dancer at Disneyland in California! If you caught any of their parades or stage shows back in the 1990s, you definitely saw me. My range of roles was pretty wild— sometimes I was completely hidden inside a giant, sweaty costume like Goofy or Tigger, other times dressed in head-to-toe satin and sequins as a Disney Prince, or even covered in green makeup as the evil witch Maleficent. Later on, I transitioned into working as a stage manager for many of Disney's major parades and special events. That experience taught me the high-wire act of obsessing over the tiniest technical details without losing sight of the big, magical picture. It's a skill that serves me incredibly well in both my personal and professional life... and continues to drive my husband absolutely crazy on a regular basis.

What's one thing you enjoy about serving on Westminster's Session?

It is incredibly exciting to have a direct voice in guiding the future of this church that I love so deeply. My fellow Session members genuinely value unique perspectives on how to keep making Westminster as warm and inclusive as possible. It is a wonderful group of leaders who respect our traditions, look for bold new ways to increase our positive impact on the world, and above all else, always lead with love.

Habitat Volunteer for Humanity Updates

Status Report on Westminster/ Habitat for Humanity Pope Leo Village Partnership

In January, a Session committee approved Westminster's participation in the Pope Leo Village Partnership with Habitat-Portland Metro Area. This partnership was driven by a major Habitat donor who wants to use his gift to encourage further giving and volunteering from the faith community. Habitat Portland now has eight partners helping them build a 17-home site called 25th Terrace in SE Portland, which is under construction.

Westminster's commitments to the partnership fall into three categories:

Category	Volunteering Support	New-Owner Welcome Baskets	Financial Support
Commitment	240 hours	17 quilts, 17 cards	\$12,500
Status as of June 1	120 hours, 2 build dates	17 quilts, 15 handmade cards	Budgeted gift: \$1260 Hope Builder Lunch: \$15,000

As of June first, due to the efforts of 15 volunteers from the congregation, our quilting group, the Sunday School, and several members who have attended the Hope Builder Lunch, we are ahead of schedule. The Pope Leo Village Habitat construction site is also ahead of schedule with almost all 17 homes framed in.

Looking forward

We have additional build dates planned with Habitat between now and the end of September. If you would like to participate one of the builds, please contact Jack Robinson. (Contact the church office at info@westprespdx.org or 503-287-1289 if you need Jack's information.)

We will also be doing "Gifts that Build" with Habitat at Christmastime.

Habitat wants to thank Westminster for its support of this partnership that will provide new, affordable homes for 17 Portland families.

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Chimes articles are due by 5 p.m. on the dates listed below.

- ♦ August 12 for September 1-30
- ♦ September 9 for October 1-31

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