Knock, Knock
by Amanda Weber, Minister of Music and the Arts

Advent is a season often described with the word “waiting.” We are waiting for the coming of Christ, waiting for the light, for a brighter day. It’s a metaphor that seems to fit well these days, as our Advent anxieties sense the darkness and turmoil of a world that so desperately needs a word of peace.

Yet the word “waiting” is one of inaction. “Waiting” sounds as if I’m checking my watch and tapping my toe nervously, impatient for what’s next. Perhaps if I wait long enough, someone or something will change my circumstances.

Working with the Voices of Hope women’s prison choir for the last four years, I have learned that change comes from an inner pull - a tug that says, “You can and you must.” This still, small voice is what gives someone hope. It is a yearning that draws us into action.

In the last month, we have tested the hinges of the doors at Westminster, wondering if they might be able to open further to give greater welcome to a broader community. Rather than responding to “Knock, knock” with “Who’s there?,” we are called to say, “Come in!” regardless of the mystery of the knocker.

This Advent, our door will keep knocking. On December 6 and 7, we will open it to find unexpected guests at Westminster’s annual Christmas Dinners; on December 13 and 14, the knocking comes from three kings who will change a young boy’s life forever in James Sewell Ballet’s Amahl and the Night Visitors; and on December 24, we will hear the story of a young mother looking for shelter - a knock that goes unanswered, only to give birth to the Messiah in the lowliest of places.

As daylight shortens and nights feel endless, may we draw our attention to the yearning in our hearts that calls us to action. There’s a knock at the door; how shall we answer?

The Yearning
by Susan Bentall Boersma

—December 8 Choir Anthem

There is a yearning in hearts weighed down by ancient grief and centuries of sorrow.

There is a yearning in hearts that in the darkness hide and in the shades of death abide, a yearning for tomorrow.

There is a yearning, a yearning for the promised One, the First-born of creation.

There is a yearning for the Lord who visited His own, and by His death for sin atoned, to bring to us salvation.

There is a yearning that fills the hearts of those who wait the day of His appearing.

There is a yearning when all our sorrows are erased and we shall see the One who placed within our hearts the yearning.

Emmanuel, Emmanuel, within our hearts the yearning.
Building the Beloved Community

by Tim and Glenda Hoogland, Westminster members

Matthew 22 instructs us to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind...and to love your neighbor as yourself.” We’ve been able to live into this calling at Westminster.

One of the great blessings of the Westminster community is that your connection to that community can grow and change over time. For 27 years we have found that our calling to a “definite place of usefulness” evolved along with our family. When our daughters were first connected to Sunday school, Glenda found a home in the Kindergarten classroom, and with her teaching partner Randy Greene, created the Friendship Fair. This annual event welcomed our YWCA partner families into the church for food, fun, and fellowship. The Friendship Fair connected Tim’s creative talents to church school through balloon animals, but that evolved into producing epic “5th Grade Films” for Arts Month. These connections to youth ministry allowed us to see a whole generation of Westminster youth grow up in the classroom and through a camera lens. Our daughter Hannah’s participation in the Vacation Bible School at our partner church in Matanzas, Cuba, opened another door for us 10 years later as we joined a delegation to celebrate the rededication of the Versailles sanctuary and learn how Westminster is supporting access to clean water through churches across the island.

Threads of hospitality, being a good neighbor, and reconciliation tie all of these experiences together and deepen our commitment to contribute our time and to pledge our resources to the mission of the church and the beloved community it sustains. We hope you will join us in doing the same by pledging your 2020 financial support for Westminster.

Year-End Generosity Ideas

by Mary Hess, Director of Stewardship

Your financial stewardship helps build the Beloved Community; thank you for being a part of it! As you consider year-end giving, here are a few simple options to keep in mind:

1) Checks, or online contributions (westminstermpls.org/ways-to-give) are easy and may be eligible for a federal tax deduction;

2) Appreciated stock gifts can also be appealing because long-term gains are not taxed, and the gift is generally deductible from income tax;

3) IRA giving: If you’re over 70 ½, you may make a gift from your IRA without having to pay income tax on the gift. Gifts qualify for amounts up to $100,000. This action can help satisfy your required minimum distribution (RMD). Note: Consult with your tax or financial adviser before you take action; and contact your IRA plan administrator to make a gift.

4) Legacy Gifts, such as a bequest in your will, support Westminster for future generations;

5) A no-longer needed life insurance policy can be donated, and may be eligible for a tax deduction.

Contact Kienan Mick, Accounting Manager, (kmick@wpc-mpls.org) at 612-332-3421, if you would like to make arrangements with Westminster.

Be a part of Building the Beloved Community. Help Westminster live into God’s missional promise and expand the impact its ministries in 2020 by returning your pledge card; or pledge or give online. Now is the time!
Dear Friends,

Every year as we enter Advent I have the sensation of something coming that is larger than ourselves, something grander and more meaningful than our daily routines. Life is moving inexorably through the shadows toward a dawn we so desperately desire.

We lay lots of expectations on Christmas; inevitably the day will not satisfy them all. We know we will be back next year to pick up the story again.

It is not unlike the experience of choosing a Christmas tree for our living room.

Each year our family goes to the same Christmas tree lot in the downtown Farmer’s Market, to find the specimen that will grace our home for the season. We walk among the hanging trees, spinning them to check out size and height and shape. We can never quite remember how tall our ceiling is, or how wide the corner in the room.

We go every year intending to find the perfect tree, one that fills all our hopes for the season. Never mind that each one of us brings our own particular expectations each time; the *perfect tree does not exist*. But we go back year after year, hoping this might be the year we find it.

Actually, I confess I am the one in the family keen on finding the perfect tree. I always announce, no matter the size or shape or height, “This is the best tree ever!”

I am on an eternally unsatisfying quest, trying to make the season fit my needs, rather than drawing from the story the good news that in the most mundane and ordinary and *imperfect* way, God comes among us.

Entering this season, we step into a meta-narrative that is much more than something grander and more meaningful than our daily routines. Life is moving inexorably through the shadows toward a dawn we so desperately desire.

At Westminster we have many ways to experience the wonder of the season. I look forward to seeing you there. Ask me about this year’s Christmas tree.

Grace and peace,

Tim
Advent Wreath-Making (with Cocoa & Carols!)
Sunday, December 1 | 11:30 am-1 pm | Westminster Hall
Join us for a taco bar lunch, Advent wreath-making and Christmas crafts, cocoa and cookies (with roasted marshmallows), and carol-singing! All ages! Walk-ins are welcome. $10/person; $40 family max.

Service of Remembrance
Tuesday, December 3 | 6 pm | Chapel
You are invited to come and receive the gifts of music along with the comfort of the Word of God, candlelight, and the support of the community. Immediately following the service, trained prayer companions will be available to sit, listen, and pray with you. Then at 7 pm, we will gather in the Meisel Room for a hot meal.

WestConnect Annual Christmas Party
Wednesday, December 11 | 6-9 pm | Sarah Brouwer’s house
Young Adults, join us for a white elephant gift exchange. There will be dinner, frivolity, friendship, and coziness. This is the perfect chance to plug in for the first time, or bring a friend! RSVP or send questions to Sarah at sbrouwer@wpc-mpls.org.

Christmas Quiet Worship
Saturday, December 21 | 9 am | Bushnell Room
We will come together, with remembered words from Thomas Merton—who was accidentally killed in Bangkok 51 years ago; who had entered Gethsemani Monastery as a novice monk 78 years ago this month—plus quiet music, familiar Scripture, and silence. Rev. David Liddle leads worship.

FEAST
Sunday, December 22 | 4-7 pm
Help serve a meal to the hungry in the church neighborhood. Sign up at the reception desk or contact Angelique, akingsbury@wpc-mpls.org.

Gifts for Seniors
Help remember isolated seniors with a gift this season. Look for the ‘Gifts for Seniors’ gift barrel near the reception desk to donate the gifts most requested by seniors and the agencies that serve them. Visit giftsforseniors.org for more information.

The Christmas Joy Offering has been a cherished Presbyterian tradition since the 1930s. The Offering distributes gifts equally to the Assistance Program of the Board of Pensions and to Presbyterian-related schools and colleges equipping communities of color. The Assistance Program provides critical financial support to church workers and their families. Presbyterian-related schools and colleges provide education and leadership development while nurturing racial and ethnic heritage. This has been a Presbyterian commitment for nearly 140 years. An offering envelope is included in this issue of the News. The Christmas Joy Offering will be received on Dec. 22.
Preparing for Baptism Conversations
by Meghan Gage-Finn, Executive Associate Pastor

Westminster’s Early Childhood Ministries Team plans to offer regular conversations for families who are preparing to celebrate their child’s baptism, in order that they might connect more deeply with one another and gain a greater understanding of the meaning of the sacrament. On Saturdays February 1 and April 18, from 10:30-11:30 am, I will lead a conversation, along with others who serve in Early Childhood Ministries. The hope is that families will learn more about the significance of baptism in the life of their family and the life of the church, while also learning more about programs and opportunities for faith and fellowship for young families. All families are welcome, but those who plan to celebrate a child’s baptism in the early months of 2020 are especially encouraged to take part in one of these mornings! Childcare will be provided. If you would like more information, you may contact me at mgage-finn@wpc-mpls.org, or Eliza Conrad, Early Childhood Ministries Chair, at Conrad.ee@gmail.com.

Matt Skinner to Serve as Scholar for Adult Education
by Meghan Gage-Finn, Executive Associate Pastor

The Rev. Dr. Matt Skinner is a familiar face to many at Westminster, worshipping in the pews on Sunday mornings, teaching 7th and 8th grade Sunday School, or leading Adult Education classes. Matt is a professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, and has written and published extensively on The Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. He will add a new role to the educational life of Westminster by serving as Scholar for Adult Education, beginning January 1, 2020. This part-time position will allow for continued pastoral support for ongoing Adult Education ministries, while also creating space for Matt to think creatively with Adult Education leaders about new directions and new offerings within and outside the walls of the church.

He will work collaboratively with the to-be-called Associate Pastor for Faith Formation to develop and grow educational opportunities for adults. In his own words, he says, “I am excited to be part of the next chapter in Westminster’s story, as we work together to expand and focus our opportunities for education and faith formation. We find ourselves in an opportune time for our congregation to grow deeper into our faith and to create spaces for wider conversations with and on behalf of our neighbors.” I know you will join me in welcoming Matt enthusiastically to the staff team!

Choir Tour to Wales
by Amanda Weber
Minister of Music and the Arts

In May of 2008, the Westminster Choir enjoyed a tour to Scotland where we learned about Scottish Presbyterian history and sang of our faith, all while enjoying beautiful sights, delicious food, and an even better community of people. Now, we are hard at work planning another tour—this time to Wales in May of 2021.

Over the course of twelve days, the choir will visit Chester, Aberystwyth, the Pembrokeshire Coast, Cardiff, Warwick, Coventry, and Oxford. Highlights will include performances in various places, such as St. David’s Cathedral and the Llandaff Cathedral as well as visits to the National Library, Wales Millennium Center, evensong in Oxford, and the famous Coventry Cathedral. This “choral pilgrimage” will once again connect us to our Presbyterian roots and help us to expand our understanding of music and community through a global lens.

For more information on how you might join the Choir for this trip, or to support our fundraising efforts, contact Amanda at aweber@wpc-mpls.org.
Proposed Minneapolis Conversion Therapy Ban
by Doug Mitchell, Associate Pastor Emeritus

The City of Minneapolis is pursuing an ordinance to ban the practice of conversion therapy on youth. Council Member Phillipe Cunningham and Council Vice President Andrea Jenkins are leading a broad-based task force with participation by many city departments and community organizations. “Conversion therapy” includes a range of dangerous and discredited practices aimed at changing a person’s sexual orientation, or efforts to change a person’s gender identity or expression. These harmful practices are based on the false claim that being Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer (LGBTQ) is a mental illness that should be cured. Unfortunately, many LGBTQ Minnesotans are still coerced and subjected to these harmful practices, which put them at risk for serious harms such as depression, substance abuse, and suicide.

Special leadership is being provided by OUTFRONT MINNESOTA. OUTFRONT designed and distributed a Conversion Therapy Ban Survey to gather information about people’s knowledge of and attitudes toward conversion therapy. Early analysis of the first 500 responses includes these data highlights: born between 1933 and 2005; 62% of respondents have been told that being LGBTQ+ can be changed; 24% experienced conversion therapy themselves or know of someone who had, 98% feel there is a need for this ordinance.

The Minneapolis Department of Civil Rights will be responsible for enforcement of the ordinance in cooperation with public health, safety, school and welfare departments. On November 18, the ordinance will be presented to the Public Health, Environment, Civil Rights, and Engagement Committee, and will be acted on by the full City Council on December 2.

Upcoming Performances at Westminster
by Barbara Prince, Program Facilitator for Music and the Arts

Let Westminster be your Christmas music home base this year. There are many wonderful community performances available! Check the links below for ticketing information.

MN Orchestra Holiday Brass
December 8 | 4 pm
Sanctuary

The Minnesota Orchestra's brass and percussion sections showcase their musical power and beauty in this new holiday offering. This concert offers a festive mix of seasonal and classical favorites and features Kenny Vigne’s organ instructor, Catherine Rodland!

UMN Symphony Orchestra Strings
December 10 | 7:30 pm
Westminster Hall

Along with winds from UMN faculty, Minnesota Orchestra members, and USO alumni, the concert will feature Dvorak’s Serenade for Strings and Beethoven’s Symphony No. 2 with Mark Russell Smith, conductor.

Christmas with Cantus
December 12 | 11 am
Westminster Hall

Cantus is back for this much-loved event, broadcast over MPR.

James Sewell Ballet’s Amahl and the Night Visitors
December 13 7:30 pm
December 14 2 pm
Westminster Hall

We share the James Sewell Ballet’s long-beloved take on this story of compassion and miracles, as part of the premiere season of the Westminster Performing Arts Series.

westminstermpls.org/wpas

Minnesota Orchestra
minnesotaorchestra.org/tickets

UMN Symphony Orchestra
cla.umn.edu/music/news-events

Cantus: cantussings.org
A couple years ago, Elder Lucy Quaintance and I visited a homebound member of our church. She and her husband had been tasked by Dr. Lowe with starting the merry-weds group. For decades and decades, they devoted their faith and creativity to a myriad of ministries. Yet, for the last 12 years of her life, she was widowed and homebound at a senior living community. Upon arriving, she greeted us in the atrium. She quickly ushered us into a private dining room where tea, coffee, and a plate of freshly baked cookies were waiting. She regaled us with stories of Westminster from past decades. Fond memories flowed out gently and powerfully about how important Westminster has always been for her. In response, we shared what’s happening in the church with the new construction and the famed “year of learning.” Laughter drifted upward to fill the room. Then it was communion time. She gazed upon the bulletin with the etching of the Westminster building with respect and longing. As we read the liturgy together, a solemn and joy-filled presence embraced us. “This is the body of Christ given for you,” I said, and passed the piece of communion bread saved from the last communion at church. She held it in her hands for a good moment and savored it. This Advent season, Elders and Deacons will be paired with pastors to share this sacred meal. We invite you to join us in spirit, and know that the communion we take on the first Sunday will be shared with our homebound members later in the week.

You Can’t Recycle Trash
by Doug Van Valkenburg, Eco-Justice Team

Since 1992, not everything in your curbside recycling bins has gone to local recycling centers for re-use. Instead, much of it was shipped to China, whose booming economy is desperate for raw materials. In China, the dirty, contaminated piles of “recyclables” were picked over by workers under minimal environmental controls. Some of America’s “recyclables” ended up in China’s rivers and washed out to sea, contributing to the crisis of plastic pollution in the world’s oceans. America’s ability to sort and recycle its own materials was diminished. Why bother to sort and clean “recyclables” when it was so easy to ship the whole unsorted pile off to China? Too many well-meaning people put too much trash in their recycling bins in the hope that it could be recycled.

Last year, China began to implement pollution controls and banned the import of foreign garbage. Large amounts of low quality “recyclables” began to accumulate in America. Much of our dirty, unsorted “recyclables” were nothing more than trash. Local trash collection fees went up dramatically and some single-sort recycling programs were temporarily curtailed. Fortunately, America is now rebuilding its infrastructure to properly sort high quality recyclable materials out of the trash stream. In the Twin Cities, over 97% of our recyclables are being reused by local manufacturers. Westminster has collection bins for compost, recyclables, and trash. Everything Westminster serves during a Sunday morning coffee hour and at most events is compostable, including food scraps, coffee cups, napkins, and stir sticks. Recycling bins are for clean office paper, aluminum cans, glass bottles, and plastics imprinted with the recycling emblem. Trash bins are for anything else.

Women’s Christmas Lunch
by Sarah Brouwer, Associate Pastor

On Wednesday December 11 we will gather in Westminster Hall and continue our now annual Women’s Christmas Lunch. Join us from 11:30 am to 1 pm, as we come together in festive attire, sing carols led by our choir section leaders, eat delicious food with staff members, and engage with friends new and old.

We will hear a seasonally appropriate devotion from Sarah Brouwer, reflecting on our role as women in the church and the hope Advent brings us. We will also honor four women from Westminster, as they receive the Presbyterian Women Honorary Lifetime Achievement Award. Each of these awards financially supports the Presbyterian Mission Agency of the PC(USA) and goes toward ongoing justice and mission work at the national and international levels of our denomination. Our honorees receive a special pin that will be presented by friends and ministry partners from within the congregation- please wear yours if you are a past honoree.

Our honorees this year are Doris Wong, Patricia Hammink, Janet Leick, and Margaret McVay.

RSVP by December 6 to Deb Wagner at dwagner@wpc-mpls.org, or via the link on the church website. The cost is $10, but cost should not be prohibitive. Come during your lunch hour, arrange to come with friends, or come on your own for the first time!
As our college-age students wrap up the fall semester, it is fun to think about their impending return and the chance to gather and reconnect over the holiday break. Students will receive care packages soon with information about the following opportunities, but I know some families might like the chance to mark their calendars well ahead of time.

• **December 18, 2 pm**: College Coffee, meet at the church reception desk

• **December 21, 7 pm**: Annual College-Age/Senior High White Elephant Gift Exchange, location TBD

• **January 3-4, 6 pm-8 am**: College-Age Lock-In! We will have dinner at the church, and relive the days of running around the building, watching movies, eating too many snacks, and staying up too late!

• **January 5**: Meisel Sunday, a great chance to hear from our 2019 Meisel Scholars and to consider applying for a 2020 Meisel Scholar Award.

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**The First Night**

*by Marie Kruskop, Coordinator of Early Childhood and Family Ministries*

*And in that warm, dark stable his life began.* So ends the story of Jesus’ birth as told in the children’s book *The First Night* by B. G. Hennessy. All are welcome to join us to hear the entire story in the Nursery at 9:30 on **December 15**, for a pint-sized version of Lessons and Carols. This annual event celebrates the birth of Jesus in word and song. Will Stensrud, Westminster parent and musician, will lead us in the singing of familiar carols and we’ll listen to the story *The First Night* as read by Kasey Collver, Nursery Coordinator. Join us for this special celebration, complete with holiday treats. Everyone is welcome!

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**Earth Care and Your Faith: An Invitation to Write for the Lenten Book**

*by Kathleen Campbell and Heather Heefner, Westminster Members*

Our Christian faith calls us to care for God’s creation, and in multiple ways, Westminster has responded. During Lent, the sermons and discussions to follow will explore the Environmental Crisis from the perspective of God’s creation of and covenant with the earth. Most of us have deeply personal feelings about the ecological crisis. We fear for the future of our grandchildren, mourn the extinction of animal and plant species, and lament the fires and floods that are destroying lives. We feel scared, frustrated, hopeless, hopeful. We ask, “Is it too late? What can I do?” At the same time, we enjoy our beautiful lakes, rivers, and fresh air. As many of us confess these days, “It’s complicated.”

The Lenten Book 2020 Team invites you to write a 100 to 300-word essay that contemplates your own faith in relation to caring for God’s creation—our beautiful but threatened earth. A few questions may stimulate your thinking:

• Why, or how, does our Christian faith call us to participate in caring for God’s creation?

• In the face of vast environmental challenges, how and why does our faith call us to hope?

• What has nature taught you about God? How has your experience with the natural world helped you to pray or communicate with God?

For more information about this writing opportunity, please email Heather Heefner: hheefner@gmail.com. The deadline for sending in your essay is **December 15, 2019**.
All-Church Book Read: Virgil Wander

by Trish Van Pilsum, Westminster Member

If, like many, Leif Enger’s Peace Like a River was your favorite all-church book read selection, rejoice! Ten years after launching our annual book read with Enger’s highly acclaimed debut novel, we are returning to the Minnesota author, reading his most recent achievement Virgil Wander. We are thrilled that Enger will join us in February to talk about the book following two weeks of small group discussions.

Virgil, the book’s narrator, is a “failed theology student, fresh out of God.” When he is saved from what should have been a watery death after a car crash, he struggles to define his resurrected life. The book takes us back to the beautiful North shore of Lake Superior and a small, hard luck town on the banks of the “Pentecost River.”

Virgil Wander is the perfect story to read and discuss with your church friends. Like Peace Like a River, it’s rich with biblical references and theological threads: resurrection, a series of plagues, a good Samaritan, an ark, a serpent that leaves death and destruction in its path. Leif Enger has called Virgil Wander his “most Christian book and least evangelical.” In an interview last year he said, “The book doesn’t concern itself with either orthodoxy or politics, but with decency.”

Virgil Wander is a good story about people being good to one another. It’s a story of rebirth. “People are drawn to rebirth,” a character in the book tells Virgil. You will be, too.

When I read a good book, I highlight the especially lovely turns of phrase, the little literary gems, then mark those pages with a sticker. Before I’d reached the end of Virgil Wander, I’d run out of stickers.

DATES TO REMEMBER
December 1 Books go on sale at a discounted price.
January 12 and 26: Small group book discussions during Education Hour.
February 2 Leif Enger discusses Virgil Wander during Education Hour.

A seventy-six trombone salute is deserved by our fantastic church school students who donated 191 food items to the Groveland Food Shelf on November 3 as part of The Music Man benefit movie at the Heights Theater. A parade of our Pre-K students marched the donations downstairs to a collection bin with much fanfare and the chattering music of excitement. Thank you for your generous support of our greater community!
The Importance of Saying Thanks
by Rev. Judy Landt, Mediator, Westminster Counseling Center

Recently I conducted a court-ordered mediation in which the parties were able to reach an agreement resolving their differences. On the way out, one of them said to me, “I thought mediation was going to be a big waste of time, but it actually turned out to be helpful.” Maybe this wasn’t the most gracious expression of thanks I’ve ever received, but it still left me feeling good for the rest of the day, because I had contributed something positive to someone else’s life. It was a good reminder, too, especially as we approach this season of Thanksgiving. It is easy these days to become discouraged because the problems around us seem so big and our ability to address them seems so limited. But each of us can make our corner of the world better, simply by affirming and appreciating others for the ways they have been helpful. We can start by thanking the people who helped us get where we are today: family, friends, mentors, teachers, and others. We can express appreciation to those we don’t know by name, but who contribute to our lives in a myriad of small ways: the bus driver who gets us to work, the cashier who rings up our groceries. For a challenge, we can look for something to appreciate in those we find difficult. All are made in the image of God, so everyone has some positive quality worth appreciating. When we see the best in others, we are seeing as God does.

Waiting for Jesus
by Rodney Allen Schwartz, Director, Westminster Gallery and Archive

We spend the season of Advent waiting for the birth of Jesus. Often this month-long period is filled with the distractions of getting ready for parties and spending money on gifts. The Westminster Gallery offers an opportunity to contemplate the unfolding biblical narrative through art as a respite to the busyness of the commercial world. Waiting for Jesus begins with the little prophet foretelling the coming of the Messiah and takes the viewer through Advent, Christmas, and ends with the baptism of Jesus.

This story is told through the work of multi-cultural and multi-ethnic artists and crafts persons who created a diverse variety of images depicting how the Holy Family and other participants may have appeared. While we might expect that they should look Middle Eastern, artists around the world have made them look just like themselves. A visit to our crèche collection reveals the family as if they lived simultaneously in every part of the globe.

A new tour program will launch on December 8, after the 10:30 worship service. Each Second Sunday there will be a tour lasting about a half hour that focuses on some aspect of art. This inaugural tour will focus on the exhibition Waiting for Jesus and will gather in the Westminster Gallery.

If you have questions about anything art-related at Westminster, contact Rodney Allen Schwartz, rschwartz@wpc-mpls.org.

Holy Family, by Charles Beck, woodcut, 1952