Dear friends,

Westminster Presbyterian Church in downtown Minneapolis is thriving!

The stories told in this 2019 Annual Report offer ample evidence that the Telling Presence of our congregation is strong and growing. Thanks be to God!

We decided that 2019 would be The Year of Invitation. We wanted to extend the welcome of Jesus Christ through every ministry area. We took our worship to the streets in June and September with Bluegrass Worship on the Mall. We launched the Westminster Performing Arts Series. We hosted scores of community gatherings. We began the Farmers Market, welcomed thousands of people who came through our open doors, and personally invited people to come to church.

There are many ways to gauge the effectiveness of this invitational effort. Weekly worship attendance increased by 7.5%. Our membership reached nearly 3,200. We hosted 120 community events that brought more than 17,000 people into our building. Nearly 450,000 people attended or listened to a Westminster Town Hall Forum. We even counted the cars. 89,312 vehicles parked in our garage in 2019!

Of course, numbers do not tell the full story.

Last year the six bells that will ring in our tower were cast in France. They will be dedicated on Palm Sunday, April 5, 2020. The bells all say “To God be the glory” in different languages, representing Westminster’s historic partnerships and ministries. One bell has the phrase in Hmong, in honor of our long-standing invitation and commitment to that immigrant community through Scouting. A church member sent a photo of that bell to an elected official who is Hmong. They received this note in response:

“Westminster has helped change more lives…I know for sure I wouldn’t be who I am without the scouting and community service I learned at Westminster.”

We cannot quantify that kind of impact of our church’s ministry. We may never know the difference our 2019 youth mission trips made, but we can be sure our youth improved the world at least a little bit. In September last year, formerly incarcerated men began moving into Great River Landing. We may not hear directly from them, but our partner Better Futures Minnesota reports that lives are being changed through that housing development we helped build. A Westminster team installed clean water systems in Cuba in 2019; people whom we will never meet are now healthier.

The measurement of the vitality of a congregation like ours may be made in many ways. Frankly, it all boils down to whether or not we are actively sharing the love and justice of God, particularly with the most vulnerable among us. This Annual Report shows that Westminster works hard to fulfill that Great Commandment.

I am grateful to each of you for your support and engagement in ministry in our church. Our lay leaders and staff members provide outstanding direction, encouragement, and energy. I give thanks daily for the honor to serve with you.

Grace and peace,
“Our telling presence in the city is radically different after this year. The Spirit invited us to understand ourselves and the church in new ways. We invited many new people in, yes, and we were invited to renewal and to listen with fresh ears to God’s call.”

—Rev. Dr. Meghan Gage-Finn, Executive Associate Pastor

This page from left to right: Rev. Tim Hart-Andersen; Sondra Samuels and Parker Palmer speaking at the Town Hall Forum; Dr. Amanda Weber, Minister of Music and the Arts directing the Westminster Choir; Scout Troup 100. Opposite page clockwise: Gathered at Five communion on Westminster Plaza; annual Christmas Pageant; Sunday Westminster Farmers Market produce; sounds from 29:11 musical group performing in the Westminster Performing Arts Series in Westminster Hall.
WHO DOES GOD CALL US TO INVITE INTO OUR MIDST?

That was the question at the heart of The Year of Invitation, a question we asked ourselves daily in 2019.

The question inspired us to open our doors in new ways, to listen creatively, to think about Westminster and the world around us with open hearts.

It was a transformational year in the life of this congregation.
We discovered new ways to worship and to celebrate our faith through art and music.

From *Gathered at Five* worship on Nicollet Mall to a blessing of the bikes, from bluegrass vespers on the plaza to inspiring testimony in our sanctuary, we worshiped together in new ways and made worship more invitational, relevant, and open to all.

We celebrated the gifts of Dr. Melanie Ohnstad, our beloved, long-time Minister of Music and the Arts who retired after 23 years of service, and we welcomed the new leadership of Dr. Amanda Weber. We celebrated the rebirth of the Westminster African Choir and restructured the early service Chapel Choir to make it possible for more people to participate. We welcomed our first Artist-in-Residence, percussionist Jeffrey Gram, whose work draws together people of all ages.

In our Westminster Gallery, and the many spaces around the building, Dr. Rodney Allen Schwartz curated outstanding exhibitions of art that deepened our understanding and expressions of faith through an ever-expanding array of biblical and social justice stories.

“And the first shall be last, and our eyes are opened and we’ll hear like never before. And we’ll speak in new ways, and we’ll see God’s face in places we’ve never known.”

—Open My Eyes, Lord Part of the sung Prayer for Illumination at *Gathered at Five*
O God, whose laws never change
we thank you for the things we know
that rain the sun will shine
that darkness light appears
that winter always brings the spring
that sleep we wake again
that life goes on, love remains
and life and love can never
in the name of Christ our Lord
Amen

Liz Heller 2014

Clockwise from top (this page): Calligraphy of one of Rev. Liz Heller’s prayers; Gathered at Five; Blessing of the Bikes; Wednesday Bluegrass Worship on Westminster Plaza; Sunday service in the sanctuary.

Clockwise from top (opposite page): Border CrosSing performing as part of the Westminster Performing Arts Series; farewell gathering for long-time Westminster’s Minister of Music and the Arts, Melanie Ohnstad; Easter Vigil on Westminster Plaza.
Our invitation inspired growth in membership and engagement.

Youth attendance grew considerably under the guidance of Matt Lewellyn-Otten, our new Director of Youth Ministries. Our young people are co-designing programming and taking on important leadership roles with mission trips.

Sonja Mortenson Dziekciowski, our new Director of Children’s Ministries, encouraged volunteers to contribute their gifts to Small Hands, Big Hearts service projects, the Christmas pageant, and Arts Month, bringing excitement and energy to our youngest members.

We reinvigorated women's ministries, drawing many new people, including neighbors, to our explorations of feminist spirituality. Our young adult ministries, too, have grown in their invitational quality with easily accessible events and programming.

The diversity in new member classes reflected the invitation we worked hard to extend. The remarkable mix of people included those seeking asylum, many young adults, new empty nesters who have moved downtown, people who are precariously housed, and immigrant families.
Our new building acted as mission, providing hospitality to a growing array of people and organizations.

We found that the flexibility of our new spaces invited a diversity of events. In one day, we went from a memorial service to a luncheon to a gala to a wedding to a concert.

We launched the wonderfully diverse Westminster Performing Art Series, celebrated the first wedding in our new space, hosted the Festival of Homiletics, and welcomed Beyond Sunday Connections to Westminster. We became the venue of choice for Marnita’s Table, leased our kitchen part-time to Eat for Equity, hosted mission trip groups, spent an overnight with Youth Link to bring awareness around youth homelessness, and provided space for dozens of community events and conferences.

The Minnesota Chorale, Greater Twin Cities Youth Symphonies, and Augsburg Suzuki program all make their home at Westminster now.

The Westminster Town Hall Forum continues to draw standing-room-only crowds and the Forum’s newly launched TownTalks is engaging young adults into conversations about the key issues of our day.

Clockwise from bottom (this page): TownTalks panel discussion featuring young female entrepreneurs, moderated by Marianne Combs; Maundy Thursday dinner in Westminster Hall; African Choir in Sunday services.

Clockwise from top (opposite page): Presbyterian Women awards; Women’s Summer Lunch at Jax Café; Coming Together WestConnect Young Adult Retreat; first day of Sunday School; annual high school mission trip.

129 Community Events for a total attendance of 17,100 over 89,000 cars parked
Our faith invited action.

In this Year of Invitation, we pursued new ways for Westminster members to develop their faith and increase their engagement through service, learning, storytelling, partnerships, and advocacy. Just one example: the eco-justice team recommended books to advance people's understanding of environmental issues, encouraged attendance at climate change protests, gathered a service crew to clean up at Lake Hiawatha, and formed community partnerships focused on clean water.

Our Social Justice Forums extended an invitation to learn more about racial justice and well-being, featuring people such as U.S. Senator Tina Smith who serves on committees related to health and economic wellness.

A South Sudan mission group toured four schools, learned about evaluation efforts underway, met with partners, and talked with leaders and graduates of peacemaker training. In addition, we visited our partners in Cuba and Palestine.

We also joined with Liberty Church and the Presbyterian Church (USA) in committing to the Matthew 25 Initiative, an effort to dismantle institutional racism and eradicate systemic poverty.
Our New Old Adventure educational classes grappled with the spiritual, emotional, and physical aspects of aging—topics that allowed us to reach beyond our congregation to seniors living in our community. We formed partnerships with senior-focused organizations, and witnessed a steady increase in participants and opportunities for seniors living in isolation to gather at the Magnet Senior Center.

Our meal ministry soared, and we were reminded over and over that sharing meals in critical times invites people into a unique relationship of caring.

Our Lenten devotional booklet reflected on death and transcendence and encouraged a new level of sharing about loss in our community. We launched a Befrienders ministry and were thrilled by the many members who trained to be active listeners and a caring presence for others experiencing a life challenge.

And finally, the Westminster Counseling Center continued to offer quality care for our community in welcoming spaces, making services accessible through a sliding fee scale.

We grew our care for one another.

Clockwise from top (this page): Coming Together Sunday All-Church Picnic; Ash Wednesday services; caring hands; Holiday Tea with members of Becketwood

Clockwise from top (opposite page): The opening of Great River Landing (affordable housing created through Open Doors Open Futures); annual Habitat for Humanity work week; FEAST food preparation; annual Fair Trade Fair booth; PCUSA Study Group and representatives of the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan; Social Justice Forum featuring Senator Tina Smith.
We gave with joy and gladness.

Westminster’s invitation to give to its growing ministries resulted in a 12% increase in the number of pledgers in 2019, including many new members. Special gifts supported new efforts to engage with the wider community, especially with seniors in the downtown area.

Many members also create a legacy of gratitude that extends beyond their lifetime; in 2019, Westminster received six legacy gifts from generous donors who wished to be a part of sustaining Westminster for generations to come.

“As we rise to the challenges of the world, we can cooperate in bringing about God’s intentions for humankind. Our stewardship of this beloved community, and faithful gifts of time, talent and resources, are an act of faith and an expression of gratefulness.”

—Jane Oberrender and Andrea Knoll, Stewardship Co-Chairs
Westminster Bells

Bells ring out beauty in a community, calling people to a place of worship, safety, and sanctuary. They evoke the divine and mark birth and marriage, death and loss. Bells endure and ground us in the eternal. Their very resonance offers hope and courage.

In our city, bells also mark civic occasions and moments of national consequence. They ring in solidarity with other institutions to commemorate special occasions. They are, in short, a gift of beauty and unity.

Throughout 2019, a campaign to bring the James Dayton-designed bells to Westminster’s Rose Tower gathered steam. And, in early March 2020, six new bells cast at the Paccard Bell Foundry in Annecy, France, will be installed. The bells will ring out the story of Westminster’s telling presence in the city for the first time on Palm Sunday, April 5, 2020.
This page: Rendering of the Westminster Bells in the Rose Tower as viewed from Alice Rainville Place.

Opposite page: One of the six bells to be installed in the Tower on April 5, 2020.

Front cover image: Wednesday worship Silence and Song
Back cover image: Pride Week ribbons along Westminster Plaza on Nicollet Mall.

Thank you to Tom Northenscold, Paul Crosby, and Sarah Brouwer for the images used throughout this publication.