As director of the Westminster Town Hall Forum, Susan McKenna has welcomed many leading thinkers and writers of the day to Westminster’s sanctuary. If you ask her who her favorite speaker was, be prepared: the list is long! McKenna retired this summer after 16 years at the helm of the Forum. And despite the fact that she closed out her tenure during a pandemic, she remains a positive, vivacious force, deeply committed to the Westminster congregation and wider community.

“Susan is the most tolerant, self-effacing person,” said Sandy Wolfe Wood, who has worked alongside McKenna as a designer and Forum board member since 2005. “She cares deeply about the presentation of the Forum and makes sure people are welcomed into the space. She has built it into something where people recognize the church because of the Forum. Support has grown from a handful of donors to more than 900 today.”

Wolfe Wood notes that McKenna had a remarkable ability to forecast up-and-coming speakers and those who draw diverse crowds. “Susan does so much reading and is so well informed. She often got people booked before they were really well known.”

For her part, McKenna says it was “always interesting to get a glimpse into the life and character of our celebrated speakers.” Her list of highlights is indeed long but here is an abbreviated look at a few of her remembrances:

The warmth, graciousness, and goodness of E. J. Dionne; the care and attention that David Halberstam extended to high school students, answering questions for as long as they wanted; the boldness of Jeffrey Sachs, Jonathan Capehart, and John Shelby Spong, who pulled no punches and told us what we needed to hear; the unwavering commitment of Joan Chittister and Simone Campbell to Christian teachings on social justice, always accompanied by light and hopeful hearts; the kindness of writer Richard Stengel, whose life was changed by the example of Nelson Mandela; Pixar’s Pete Docter, who spent nearly three hours signing drawings of school children; the deep-down decency of Walter Mondale; Bryan Stevenson, Westminster Presbyterian Church | 1200 Marquette Avenue | Minneapolis, MN 55403 | 612.332.3421 | westmintermpls.org
The CARES Act and Charitable Giving
by Mary Hess, Director of Stewardship

The CARES ACT (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act) was signed into law on March 27, 2020. The act seeks to alleviate economic hardship that has resulted from the coronavirus pandemic. Some key provisions that might help in planning your charitable giving are:

1. **Higher Deduction Limits**: For the year 2020, individuals can deduct cash contributions made to qualified charitable organizations of up to 100% of their adjusted gross income (AGI). In 2021, the limit for deducting cash contributions will return to 60% of the taxpayer’s AGI.

2. **New $300 Charitable Deduction for Non-Itemizers**: For the calendar year 2020, the CARES Act enables taxpayers who take the standard deduction to claim an above-the-line tax deduction for a total of $300 in qualified cash donations on their tax return.

3. **Required Minimum Distributions Suspended**: For the calendar year 2020, the CARES Act temporarily waives the mandate for those who are normally required to take their Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs). This applies to all types of retirement plans (including IRAs, 401(k)s, 403(b)s, 457(b)s, and inherited IRA plans).

Before you act, be sure to check with your financial adviser, accountant, or other professional to discuss how these provisions may impact your situation. To discuss a contribution to Westminster, contact Mary Hess at mhess@wpcmpls.org.

Note: this article includes information from the Presbyterian Foundation

Help the Future Thrive: New Legacy Resources
by Mary Hess, Director of Stewardship

This June, Westminster launched a series of new, content-rich pages on the Westminster website about the Legacy of Gratitude Program. Interactive, colorful, and full of compelling examples, these pages are a useful tool to anyone interested in exploring a legacy gift to the church. The pages include visuals of popular options, such as beneficiary designations, bequests, retirement assets, as well as explanations of trusts and other ways to give and receive income. There is information on the Legacy Circle, how gifts are used, an FAQ, the CARES Act, and sample language for a bequest. In short, the new pages offer valuable interactive tools to help congregants think through options for creating a planned gift that will outlive their lifetimes and that will lay the groundwork for future generations to live the faith.

Many people assume that only the wealthy can make a planned gift. However, large gifts are the exception rather than the rule, and ALL gifts, no matter the size, will multiply to sustain the future. Gifts from assets such as retirement accounts and no-longer-needed life insurance can be excellent ways to give, with no cost today.

Westminster needs your help to thrive into the future so that the church can be a source of hope for our children and grandchildren. In the Apostle John’s letter to Gaius (3 John 1:4), he says, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.” Your Legacy Gift will help future children learn to walk in truth. Visit westministermpls.org/legacy-giving to learn more, or contact Mary Hess at mhess@wpcmpls.org.
From Our Pastor

Dear friends,

I can barely remember back in early March – can you? – when the “pause” in worship and other activity in our building began. It’s been almost five months. I am grateful for how our staff members and lay leaders are maintaining the life and vitality of Westminster through these days of distance…but it is getting old.

The Responsible Building Use Task Force – the Reboot Task Force – has been meeting weekly for two months. Led by Clerk of Session Vince Thomas, the Task Force has been listening to and learning from advice offered by scientists, healthcare practitioners, medical experts, and public health leaders in our own congregation, and to guidance from the Minnesota Department of Health and the CDC. The Reboot Task Force will soon make recommendations to Westminster’s Session.

The group has heard from church members and others in the community eager to return to in-person gatherings at Westminster. All of us share the same hope: to move beyond the Covid-19 crisis as soon as possible. To that end, the Reboot Task Force is developing an incremental plan to a phased-in return to building use.

The phased plan is based on reaching certain medical thresholds in the pandemic – primarily sustained reduction in the spread of the virus –to allow increasingly more use of the building. We are in Phase II right now, which means very little may happen in the facility. Instead, we are focusing on being the church through the use of technology. Worship, small groups, classes, fellowship, and care are all happening online. Mission engagement continues where it can be done safely.

This fall Westminster will expand the creative ways we experience church. Stay tuned for more info.

I am not alone in longing to hear hymns sung by the congregation in the sanctuary, to meet and greet before and after worship, to gather for coffee and tea in Westminster Commons, to hear music in Westminster Hall, to watch children running and playing in the Rec Room, to see the parking garage filled on a Sunday morning, to host a Town Hall Forum, even to sit in a committee meeting in the Trinity Conference Room!

But I also know we all share the commitment to do these things only when it is safe to do so. In the meantime, we have covenanted together still to be the church.

See you in church, online.

Grace and peace,
August Adventures in Music
This August we will have the opportunity to hear from and learn more about the various musical ensembles that have made Westminster their home. Cantus, Minnesota Chorale, Augsburg Suzuki, and the Greater Twin Cities Youth Symphony typically fill our hallways with beautiful music. Although these groups are not able to hold traditional rehearsals during the pandemic, several have found creative ways to continue to connect. We look forward to featuring their pre-recorded music in the 10:30 am Sunday service during August!

Summer New Members Class
**Sunday, August 23 | 10:30 am | Zoom**
We have many new folks in our community participating in worship and we would like to provide an opportunity for them to unite with Westminster in membership before the regularly scheduled fall class. If you know of someone who might be interested in knowing more about membership at this time, please encourage them to connect with Meghan Gage-Finn, mgage-finn@wpc-mpls.org.

WestConnect Young Adults
**Wednesdays in August | 7 pm | Zoom**
On August 12 we will gather for a socially distanced, masked event at Sarah’s home. We will spread out, front yard and backyard, if necessary. Send a note to Sarah with any questions! An RSVP is required to Sarah at sbrouwer@wpc-mpls.org.

WestConnect Morning Bible Study
Bible Study will take a break in August to work on September programming. Let Sarah know if you are interested in a Zoom Bible Study, or continuing on Facebook Live. A fall curriculum will be made available for participants. Contact Sarah with questions at sbrouwer@wpc-mpls.org.

Behind-the-Scenes at “Fire & Song.” During the month of July, our mid-week worship took on a “camp” theme, gathered around a fire, singing songs and hearing scripture about justice, and celebrating community with S’mores!
Through the summer, the series “Big Questions for a Changing Church” has brought several theological thinkers from around the country to Westminster, via the Web. Each week a different theologian has shared thoughts on how congregations are currently changing—and how they should endeavor to change further—in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and the renewed imperative to dismantle our racist policies and assumptions. In interviews with these guests, we have discussed a range of topics such as the nature of repentance, the challenges of digital community, the value of reading the Bible in conversation with others, and the need to confront the church’s past mistakes.

Beginning Sunday, August 9, and continuing through August, we will return to broadcasting new interviews on Sunday mornings beginning at 9:15 am (instead of on Monday afternoons). Join us online and continue to ponder how this period of change in which we find ourselves is prompting Westminster to discover God’s presence and call to action in new and enlarged ways. If you have missed any previous installments in the series, you can find them online in the adult education section of Westminster’s YouTube channel: youtube.com/westminstermpls.

Maria Teresa Kumar | Election 2020: Securing the Vote
Tuesday, October 6, Noon

Maria-Teresa Kumar is the founding president of Voto Latino, a grassroots organization committed to engaging, educating, and empowering a new generation of Latinx voters and to creating an inclusive and accountable democracy. By leveraging youth, technology, social platforms, and influencers, Voto Latino reaches 6.5 million people monthly, and it has set a goal to register 500,000-plus voters before the 2020 election. She is vice chair of the board of EMILY’s List, a resource for women running for elective office, and she serves on the board of the World Economic Forum’s Global Shapers.

Bill McKibben | Building a Movement to Stop Climate Change
Tuesday, October 27, Noon

Bill McKibben is an environmentalist, educator, and author. He is the Schumann Distinguished Scholar in Environmental Studies at Middlebury College and a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. A prolific author, his 1989 book, The End of Nature, is regarded as the first book for a general audience on climate change. He is the founder of 350.org, the world’s largest grassroots campaign to counter the effects of climate change. He is the recipient of the Gandhi Prize, Thomas Merton Prize, the Right Livelihood Prize, and honorary degrees from 18 colleges and universities. He lives in the mountains above Lake Champlain in Vermont.

Eddie Glaude Jr. | James Baldwin’s Lessons on Race in America
Tuesday, November 10, Noon

Eddie Glaude Jr. is the James S. McDonnell Distinguished University Professor at Princeton University and chair of the Department of African American Studies. He is the former president of the American Academy of Religion, the largest professional organization of scholars of religion in the world. He is the author of the award-winning books In a Shade of Blue: Pragmatism and the Politics of Black America and Democracy in Black: How Race Still Governs the Soul of America. His most recent book is Begin Again: James Baldwin’s America and Its Urgent Lessons for Our Own. He is a columnist for Time magazine and a regular contributor on MSNBC.
Senior High Mission [Trip] Possible
by Meghan Gage-Finn, Executive Associate Pastor

This summer has invited all of us to reimagine the ways we gather, connect, and serve, and the matter of the traditional, out-of-state Senior High Mission Trip was no exception. Plans for the scheduled trip to Bozeman, MT, have been set aside until a time when that is safe. However, during mid-July, senior high youth and leaders spent a week together, in the Twin Cities, serving and growing together in a variety of ways.

Throughout the week, Director of Youth Ministries Matt Lewellyn-Otten planned Mission [Trip] Possible, which included activities that were virtual and in-person (with masks and social distancing). One morning, the group sorted food donations at the Open Door Food Pantry and another morning weeding and learning about native plants and grasses at the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden. Virtual components included hearing from staff at Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative about affordable housing initiatives in our community, and moving through a training with the YWCA titled, “White Privilege 101.”

We read The Unmattering of Black Lives, and Letter from a Birmingham Jail.

Our young people were challenged to think critically about what they have witnessed in recent months and how they are a part of justice and change, as people of faith. The week also included fun games and social activities, ending with Senior Night and an at-home Netflix movie-watching party. With joy and gratitude, we followed the leading of the Spirit to witness to the gospel imperative to love and serve God and one another.

Girl Scout Cookies Update
by Marie Kruskop, Coordinator of Early Childhood and Family Ministries

Remember back in February and March when Girl Scouts who attend Westminster were selling cookies, both for donations for Westminster’s Community Partners and for members of the congregation? While your cookies may be long gone (especially since we’ve been sheltering in place for a few months!), guests at FEAST and visitors to the Groveland Food Shelf were offered nearly 220 boxes of cookies in June. Perhaps you put a box or two in your freezer? That is what we did for The Magnet Senior Center. Once they are able to gather again at Westminster, they’ll have Girl Scout cookies to look forward to! All in all, 651 boxes were sold: 424 for members of the congregation and 227 for our Community Partners. Thank you!

Moms Off the Clock
by Marie Kruskop, Coordinator of Early Childhood and Family Ministries

“Moms Off the Clock” is a time for moms to be off duty, to not be actively parenting, to be relaxing! It is intended for moms, with children of any age, to take a break and socialize. Our focus is on casual, cozy conversation in the style of Hygge (pronounced “hoo-ga”), which comes to us from the Danes, considered the happiest people in the world. Our conversations are sparked by questions – sometimes silly (Did you ever have a really bad haircut? Did it happen during Covid-19?), always interesting (What city exceeded your expectations when you visited it?) – and designed to bring people together to build community. We’re learning in this time of shelter-in-place that we need to find other ways in which to do so. Join us.

Our next virtual gathering is Thursday, August 27, at 9:30 pm. Contact Marie (mkruskop@wpc-mpls.org) for Zoom details.
The Risk of Singing
by Amanda Weber,
Minister for Music and the Arts

In my last newsletter article, I mentioned the health risks of singing together that have been highlighted during Covid-19. Since then, the death of George Floyd and the uprisings for justice have had me thinking about the risks of singing in a new way. Music has long been a shared language for those who are oppressed. Sometimes its function is healing, sometimes educational, sometimes subversive. It might be an outcry, a call-and-response kind of singing that energizes a crowd. Singing taps into our deepest longings for self-expression. It unites us in large numbers and empowers the people. It is a non-violent form of action, completely peaceful, and therefore dangerous in the view of many.

In mid-July, I experienced the risk of singing in an unexpected way. I received a call from an attorney, notifying me that one of the singers from Voices of Hope-Shakopee (a women’s prison choir) was at risk of deportation. Not having been to the prison since March, our volunteer team had celebrated what we thought was her release date toward the end of April, only to find out she had been released to ICE custody. We wrote character reference letters on her behalf and showed up at immigration court to sing songs of justice and to attend her deportation hearing. We were singing for her life.

The attorney said he’d never seen anything like it, thanking us for showing up. “In most cases like this, there’s no community present for the defendant,” he said. “It makes a difference for the judge to see a courtroom full of supporters.”

In these days of quiet and separation, may we remember the power of using our voices. May we be brave enough to sing out for justice and to embrace the risks of what it means to follow Jesus.
“You Can’t Stop the Waves, but You Can Learn to Surf” – Jon Kabat-Zinn

We’ve probably all realized by now that the “new normal” is essentially uncertainty. Most of us are much more comfortable when life has a certain degree of predictability. We like to feel things are under control. But the past few months have probably felt to many as though the world is spinning out of control. This has been a topic of conversation with many clients. Specifics differ, but the common denominator is a struggle with an uncertain future.

So how do we respond to this unprecedented time we are in? Try this: Give yourself permission to sit and let go of absolutely everything. At least for a little while. Get comfortable, become aware of your breath, and slowly repeat to yourself, “Nothing needs to be fixed, or solved, or worked out right now.” Troubling thoughts and emotions can simply move through you while you let go. It’s akin to stepping out of a powerful river. Just stand on the shore and let it all flow by. Don’t worry, once you are done with this exercise the river is still there and happy to sweep you up again. But with practice, we can hop onto the shore, or maybe scramble to a sturdy rock in the middle of the current, and catch our emotional breath, to “reset” so we can move forward with more clarity and balance. We can slowly gain a sense of calm and control in the midst of currents of uncertainty.

Visit the Westminster Counseling Center at westminstercounseling.org for more information and to make an appointment.

An Art Project in Palestine

by Rodney Allen Schwartz, Director, Westminster Gallery and Archive

Pre-pandemic, I was scheduled to travel to our global partnership in Bethlehem, Palestine, to curate and install an exhibition. I am now working on that project remotely. This takes working from home to the extreme.

The Evangelical Christmas Lutheran Church, our partner congregation, began an arts education program 25 years ago with the establishment of the Diyar Consortium. This consortium taught arts classes in the church building in an effort to preserve the art and culture of Christians living in Palestine. Steady growth in programs offered and the number of students enrolled led to the foundation of a college which eventually became Dar Al-Kalima University College of Arts and Culture. I have enjoyed the privilege of traveling to Palestine three times and taught a summer course at the university on museum and exhibition design in 2011.

An international conference titled “Decolonial Histories...Indigenous Theologie...Arts of Résistance” was planned for this summer with participants coming from around the globe in celebration of this 25th anniversary. I was invited to go there to curate an exhibition from the university collection of Palestinian art, and to teach staff about the proper care and storage of the collection.

The conference has been postponed but the exhibition is going up. I am waiting for the arrival of photographs of all of the art. Then, I will decide which pieces to use, develop a theme, and suggest the installation order based on gallery blueprints. Once the pandemic is ended and it is safe to travel, I will go there to complete the art archival education. My travel is supported by a grant from Westminster’s Global Partnership Fund.

With Angie Saba in one of the Dar Al-Kalima galleries, 2013
As August begins, Westminster enters its fourth month of virtual worship services. When you tune into the livestream on Sunday mornings you see the hard work of two people working tirelessly behind the scenes to make our livestream possible—Eric Adams and Keith Kopatz. Eric and Keith serve as Westminster’s camera operators, producers, video editors, and all-around livestream and tech gurus. They work closely together to create and upload all of the media you see online today. While we aren’t able to worship in person as a congregation, we are blessed to be able to worship online, and we couldn’t do it without Eric and Keith. The church is incredibly grateful to them for all of their faithful work.

Communications Intern
by Sarah Brouwer, Associate Pastor

Anna Northenscold has been our rock star communications intern this summer! Westminster has benefitted from Anna’s social media prowess, her patience updating the Westminster YouTube channel, her quick ability to learn how to edit our Wordpress website, and her ideas around effective communication. Thanks to the Meisel Scholarship, we have been blessed by her gifts and her all around great attitude this summer. We’re also grateful to Brigitte Parenteau of Parenteau Graves (our communications consultants) for mentoring Anna. Finally, a big thank you to Anna. We’re not sure what we’re going to do without her when she returns to Luther College this fall.

Director of Congregational and Community Engagement
by Meghan Gage-Finn, Executive Associate Pastor

Rachel Sheild Gustafson has worked for two decades in public policy and advocacy, specializing in community engagement. Her professional experience spans grassroots community organizing to federal policymaking, particularly around public health, child welfare, and the arts. Rachel has an MFA in creative writing from Seattle Pacific University and an MPH in maternal and child health from the University of Minnesota. She is the mother of three obstinate, headstrong girls (a la Elizabeth Bennet). In her free time, Rachel loves writing essays, finding excuses to get outdoors, and gathering people in her home for food and connection.

Gathered at Five
by Sarah Brouwer, Associate Pastor

In August, Gathered at Five enters part II of “Learning on the Way.” Together with the morning service, Gathered is exploring all the ways we are learning and unlearning so much, as our lives have all been changed by Covid-19 and this historic moment of reckoning with racial injustice. This coming month will give us the opportunity to wonder about discipleship. The Greek word for learner, in the Gospels, is translated to disciple — someone who learns from an expert and is transformed and forever changed.

As Christians, our expert is Jesus. And, as learners — or disciples — how are our lives being molded by his ways in the world? Alanna, David, Tim, and Meghan will preach. So, tune in and be gathered with us at five.

Susan McKenna continued from cover.

one of the purest souls walking the earth today, whose belief that no person is irredeemable and that every person is better than their worst act; Mona Hanna-Attisha and David Hogg, who received a standing ovation when they simply entered the sanctuary; Julian Bond, whose leadership during the civil rights movement of the sixties inspired countless numbers of college students to social activism; and the unpretentious, engaging, and down-to-earth manner of Gwen Ifill.”

The Westminster community extends its deep thanks to Susan McKenna for faithfully serving us so well, for so many years. We wish her well in her retirement, which, not surprisingly, will be focused on learning! She plans to travel to explore sites related to American literature, visit all the presidential libraries and the Civil Rights trail, and explore the route of Lewis and Clark. Godspeed, Susan!
HELPING YOU KNOW WHERE TO GO!
As we continue to meet virtually and use new platforms and tools to connect, this chart is designed to make sure you know where to find information, meetings, and worship services. Put this on your fridge!

Website | westminstermpls.org
- Main Calendar with event details and links to resources, contacts, etc.
- Family, Youth, and Children's Calendar with details specific to those events.
- Worship info, previous sermons, etc.
- Publications, include Westminster News, Thin Places
- Ways to get involved
- Adult education information
- E-mail list sign up (at top of website)
- Gallery exhibitions

Livestream Worship Services
westminstermpls.online.church

iTunes Worship Podcast
Search Westminster Minneapolis

Tithe.ly
Westminster's giving app
(for iPhone and Android)

Facebook | facebook.com
- Westminster: news, events, news from community partners, issues we care about, access to Facebook Live (facebook.com/westminstermpls)
- Gathered @ Five: info about our casual, non-traditional worship, events, book reads and more (facebook.com/gatheredatfive)
- WestConnect: page for young adults (facebook.com/groups/westconnect)
- Youth: resources, photos, and comments for parents, students, staff and lay leaders (facebook.com/groups/westminsteryouthministry)
- Families: resources, photos, and comments for parents of children (facebook.com/groups/WPCFYC)

Daily Devotion
Available by calling 612-332-7087.

Instagram | instagram.com
- Main page (@westminstermpls)
- Gathered @ Five (@gatheredatfive)
- Youth (@wpcmpls_youth)

YouTube | youtube.com
youtube.com/westminstermpls
- Adult education videos
- Playlists with categories of videos (worship, music, nursery, global outreach and more)

Zoom
Virtual platform for small group and business meetings. Reach out to Janice Teliczan for information jteliczan@wpc-mpls.org.

Weekly Eblasts
News, events and information about a variety of topics. Sign up at tinyurl.com/y6pw2now OR at westminstermpls.org.