

(intro slide 7) Do Justice; Love Kindness and Mercy; Walk Humbly with God

INTRODUCTION

We at Westminster Presbyterian Church are a community inspired by the call in Micah 6:8: to do justice, love kindness and mercy, and to walk humbly with God. This call draws our community together as we seek opportunities to put faith into action. Since its inception in 1874, Westminster's members have been leaders in women's and civil rights and have worked to be peacemakers at local, national and international levels.

Here are some examples of Westminster's striving to follow the call of Micah 6:8. What we share is but a small sample of our Westminster community life since our 100th anniversary celebration in 1974.

DO JUSTICE

8 (header) DO JUSTICE:

Westminster has a long history of engaging in social justice issues with work toward reconciliation. With our faith rooted in a vision for a more just world, we are challenged to become more mindful through prayer, worship, education and service of doing justice.

9 (header) RACIAL JUSTICE

We strive to be mindful of racism in our midst and work toward finding opportunities to build the "Beloved Community" through raising awareness and partnering with local organizations such as the NAACP.

10 Over these years, book studies and speakers in adult education classes have helped us become mindful and engaged in work toward racial justice.

11 We have participated in rallies and marches against racial injustice. **12** We have participated in events celebrating Black history such as the Juneteenth celebration and **13** we have raised awareness of community issues. **14** / When David and Marty Moldstad's son-in-law, an official at the **Southern Poverty Law Center**, came to Wooster for a weekend, he inspired many in worship toward concrete work for racial justice. Westminster partnered with the NAACP to set a goal of eliminating the sale of Confederate flag merchandise at the Wayne County Fair. Thus, the Wayne County Fair for All campaign was begun and ultimately achieved its goal.

15 (header) ECONOMIC and HEALTH JUSTICE

Westminster is a giving community of believers and seekers. In addition to the time and energy spent on various social justice causes, members and volunteers are committed to compassionate acts of service that benefit the local community and beyond.

16 In 1994, and 95, our youth experienced urban issues firsthand through the **Cleveland Catholic Worker's Urban Plunge** experience. They learned lessons about a reality different from theirs when they temporarily lived as one without a home. The experience included eating meals at a shelter and working in a community garden.

17 Our youth groups raised money for mission trips to New York, Arizona, the Dominican Republic and multiple trips to Mexico. **18** Participants provided labor for specific projects and gained perspective regarding how life in a developing country differs from their own. **19** The young people in these slides are now adults, many of whose adult life paths have been impacted by these trips.

20 REFLECTION QUOTE: Mary Kilpatrick, a member from the 70s through 2013 states in her reflection: *"My children were educated in Westminster, especially in the youth group. I appreciated the leadership of the pastors and Greg Barbu in the deep open discussions and activities. With the mission trips they took to various places, they were able to learn about how others lived and were able to do mission work to help others. This made a big impression on them about the importance of serving, as Jesus taught. My oldest son, now a doctor, continues in his present church to support and volunteer in an ongoing mission in the Dominican Republic."*

21 The youth were not the only ones traveling to Mexico. In 2005, adult Westminster members traveled to Hobox - a small island on the northern tip of the Yucatan to build a classroom atop the roof of the Iglesia Nacional Presbiteriana church.

22 We supported Habitat for Humanity in Wayne County by providing labor and meals for workers. **23** Our financial commitment included yearly donations and special fundraisers such as yard sales, meals and auctions.

24 Collecting and packing items for **Gifts of the Heart** provided a hands-on activity assisting neighbors near and far. Hygiene Kits provide basic necessities to those affected by natural or human-made disasters. School kits support children's education. Initiated by Reverend Meyer, Westminster has contributed over \$50,000 worth of items for the Gifts of the Heart kits.

25 We have had the **"Hearty Italian Soup Sale"** for 15 years. In these photos we are making hearty Italian soup with students in the English as a Second Language and adult

basic education classes. This gave participants a chance to practice language skills and “pay it forward” through helping others. **26** Money earned from soup sales financed the following: GED tests, work clothing, transportation vouchers, cots for the severe weather shelter, and funds to assist refugees and our immigrant siblings.

27 Westminster has supported **Every Woman’s House** from its inception in 1979 with both volunteers and financial assistance. **28** Talent shows, free-will offering at meals and other activities generated funds.

29 Break the Cycle teams have walked and cycled in multiple events, raising awareness of and money for chemical dependency recovery.

30 We also supported **Central American Medical Outreach** and **Meals on Wheels** with volunteer labor and funds.

31 (header) GENDER JUSTICE

Westminster is a fully open, affirming, and inclusive church with a long history of working for women’s rights and supporting the LGBTQIA+ community. We support the inherent, sacred worth of all persons and their gifts for leadership in the life of the church and the world.

32 The **Women’s Study and Support group, dream group, Woman Church** and women’s retreats provided safe spaces for exploring and honoring the **Divine Feminine, 33** women’s intuition and life experiences.

In our reflections, a participant states: *“My theology was broadened through the study of many books in **Women’s Study and Support Group**, worship during **Women’s Church**, and activities of **Dream Group**. I became aware of inclusive language about God.”*

34 Attending marches in Washington and gathering locally in support **35** of women’s issues were powerful, affirming experiences.

36 Likewise, support for and solidarity with others regarding human rights for LGBTQIA+ siblings is an expression of justice for all God’s children. **37 pause 38**

39 (header) WORLD PEACE/RECONCILIATION (pause)

40 Advocating for peace in Central America has continued from the 1980s, with demonstrations and marches. The photos here are from a march in the late 1980s **41** when we took students to Washington DC in support of peace in Central America and South Africa.

42 To better understand the continuing conflict in the Middle East, we embarked upon book study and discussion and sponsored speakers residing in Israel/Palestine

43 Westminster member Nahida Gordon is recognized nationally and internationally for her leadership in working for justice in Palestine. **44** Westminster sponsored at least 3 trips to Palestine, which included College of Wooster students and church adults. **45** The Westminster trips the Gordons organized were transformational for those participating. These provided first-hand experiences of the Palestine reality, including international groups picking olives for harvest on Palestinian land that was in jeopardy.

46 As part of a peacemaking project on Palestine, we partnered with **St. George Greek Melkite Church** with its priest, Fr. Abuna Firas.

47 Our support continues through the sale of soap and oil made from olives harvested in Palestine.

48 With member Richard Bells' connections to South Africa, we studied about indigenous African philosophy and both the challenges of healing the country and the construction of a new constitution. Pastor Dries Coetzee, a native of South Africa, further enhanced our knowledge of the history of that country. **49** He led 2 different groups to South Africa to understand apartheid **50** and the work of South Africans toward peace and reconciliation. **51**

52 (header) IMMIGRATION JUSTICE:

Many in our congregation supported the Sanctuary Movement in the 1980s. They not only studied locally about the plight of Central American immigrants, but also desired to experience and connect more directly with those fleeing from persecution.

53 In 1990, associate pastor Tim Anderson took the first group of Westminster high school youth on a mission trip to the Dominican Republic

54 In 1991, he took another Westminster youth group trip to Arizona and Mexico through the BorderLinks organization, an organization which grew out of the Sanctuary Movement.

55 That transforming experience for our youth then inspired the first adult group to take a BorderLinks trip in 1992.

56 In 2010 and 2012, we took both Westminster members and College of Wooster students on BorderLinks trips. **57** We experienced the difficulty and danger of the desert and heard stories of those who made desert crossings.

58 Our increased awareness encouraged us to advocate for legislation for just immigration law. We formed ecumenical advocacy groups and

59 we attended statewide marches.

60 We have worked with the **Hartville Migrant Ministries**; especially enriching the experiences of the children of migrant workers.

61 We support the **Immigrant Worker Project**, a social services agency in Canton providing legal and personal help to local Latinxs. In 2019, Westminster organized an ecumenical drive in our county to purchase a van for the group. The van is now heavily used for transport to legal appointments, shopping trips and other needs.

62 COVID did not slow us down. We raised funds via a drive-through meal pick-up and outdoor dinners to support the **63 Immigrant Worker Project** and our local partner, **Open Arms Hispanic Ministries**.

64 The Director and Latinx families from **Open Arms Hispanic Ministries** shared their experiences during multiple church worship services.

65 We also provided tutors for the **Open Arms Hispanic Ministries** children's tutoring program. In addition, Westminster members serve on the Open Arms Board.

66 (header) ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Concern for God's creation has been continual, evidenced by **67** family retreats to learn about and experience nature. **68** We worked with others in community gardens, **69** for church beautification and to establish awareness of sustainability.

70 We support the **Citizens' Climate Lobby's** efforts to lower carbon emissions. Members of our church community are actively involved in fostering cooperation in Congress and in our neighborhoods.

LOVE MERCY

71 (header) Westminster seeks to be a community that values and affirms diversity. We embrace the "house" metaphor to emphasize our commitment to radical hospitality and our desire to be a welcoming and inclusive church. There have been many opportunities to offer fellowship within our church family, and to the College community,

72 from student "seeker" groups during Barbara Dua's time

73 to congregational picnics

74 to providing church youth a safe place for sharing and having fun.

75 Over the years, we extend hospitality to groups connected to the College. For more than 35 years, we hosted the **Gomes youth choir**, led by Curtis Gomes, son of College of Wooster professor and Westminster member, Anetta Jefferson.

76 Westminster's outreach to college students has been rewarding and mutually beneficial.

Heidi Häverkamp, a Westminster intern, reflects: One of the first events I attended my first week at the College of Wooster in 1994 was a Westminster welcome social in the courtyard at Mackey Hall. It was there that I met some of my very best college friends and began a spiritual journey that in large part was centered upon the loving, supportive members of Westminster Presbyterian Church. The welcome and sense of community as a young adult among older adults was also new to me, and I still give thanks for it every day.

We opened the doors of love and hospitality to students starting with brownie receptions when they arrive on campus and ending

77 with the celebration of their graduation.

78 We also have ministered to students through events open to the wider community. Our monthly vegan potlucks started in 2010 to provide support and fellowship for those desiring to learn more about healthy eating options. They have become widely attended and anticipated by college students.

79 Hospitality to the wider community has been a hallmark of our call for "loving mercy and kindness." For example, we offered "a place at the table" for a group of **Columbus City high school** soccer players, who were housed and fed at Westminster during a local tournament. Two of the boys enjoyed their time here so much that they returned to Wooster after high school to attend the College.

80 We have offered warm hospitality to Presbyterian USA leaders, such as Jimmy Hawkins, Director of the Office of Public Witness

81 and every year we celebrate the arrival of the performers and support staff from the **Ohio Light Opera Company** with a picnic.

82 Community events such as our **Chinese New Year dinner** provided us the opportunity to open our doors wide.

83 Westminster has continuously sponsored a Scout troop since 1915. We have been a home for the troop to practice the tenets of the Scout Oath. The Scouts reciprocate through the many generous ways they offer to help our congregants **84** and have helped to beautify the church-house grounds.

85 Showing and sharing kindness within our own church family has been another tangible demonstration of Micah 6:8. Our support groups have enriched the spiritual, emotional, and intellectual lives of their participants.

86 We value the lives of all our members, here making Easter baskets for shut-ins and **87** visiting those who cannot attend services.

88 Care for the congregation during the time of COVID was vital to maintaining connections. We provided “care packages” on the doorsteps of everyone in our church family.

89 We have shown love and **strengthened** our congregational community through special treat times, such as ice cream socials. **90** These were made possible through the sale of plants grown and donated by Dave Schmidt.

91 Another manifestation of Micah 6:8 is the outreach to children, both within our church family and wider community. Pastor Eniko initiated the WPC “Compassion Camps,” where children gained compassion for others through camp activities, **92** and learned first-hand about God’s gracious compassion for them, through the kindness and care of those who lead the camp.

WALK HUMBLY WITH GOD

93 (header) Westminster Presbyterian Church strives to be an inclusive community of believers and seekers. We believe God continues to call us to proclaim the inclusive love of Jesus Christ. We seek to provide a home which nurtures every member into the covenant of Christian life.

94 Westminster, with its doors open to the world, provides a place to gather where worshipers can forge relationships with God and one another. Our faith is the basis of our church family’s inspiration, actions and energy.

95 Extending communion to those who cannot attend church in person is a manifestation of the love, allowing every member into the covenant of Christian life.

96 The **continuity** of generations at Westminster was felt when Rosie Peterson was baptized into our congregation as was her dad, **97** Josh Peterson. Our spiritual bonds are formalized and strengthened through reoccurring traditions like baptism.

98 The participation of children in the celebration of our church seasons has given many of those children, shown here from 30, 40 or 50 years ago, a strong foundation for their life and faith.

99/100/101/102/103

Sandy Beery, a member who taught children's Sunday school during those years reflects: "We were smitten by the children in classes ...from '1970s through '90s..... The children and youth stretched our journey of faith over the years with our preparations from a variety of curricula, their probing questions and unquenchable **knowledge-seeking.**"

Sharing the many aspects of our faith journey honestly and openly offered seekers and believers alike a home at Westminster. **104** The "liberation Theology" journey shared during the 1992 BorderLinks trip was transformative as **105** was the sharing done during our own Bible studies.

106 From Easter Sunrise services on McGaw roof in the 1980s **107** to services at Oak Hill Park, to recent times at Westminster, we have had the gift of celebrating together. **108**

109 There is a place at Westminster for each of us, and a joy to **inclusively welcome** all who care to join us into our church family as we worship. **110**

111 We have gained much from our choir and choral scholars. One student notes in his reflections:" I sang with the Westminster Choir as a choral scholar the 4 years I was a student at Wooster. This experience was so special for so many reasons, chief among them providing me with a warm, loving community outside of the college" **112** We have been blessed with musical richness from inspired music directors and organists. Also, we are also thankful for the many years that Ken Shafer has shared his talent and time with us; here he is shown with former music director Steven Leslie.

113 Joyfully celebrating comings and goings has been a large part of Westminster's communal life, especially as the congregation - in - residence on the college campus.

114 The ties forged through Westminster have fostered deep and life-long connections. In 2008, former interns returned to Westminster for their 10-year reunion.

Former intern Mieke Vandersall reflects: “I am so grateful for Westminster as part of my larger church family that has raised me and loved me. Thank you for the opportunity to serve alongside you, be your friend, and find God in your midst. I wouldn't be where I am without the formation you offered. What a great gift that you have been present with so many students over so many years.”

We have had further opportunities to dive deeper into our relationship with God through **115** Advent and Lenten studies, **116** contemplative worship, and **117** walking in mindfulness

118 Even in the unprecedented days of **COVID-19 shutdowns and isolation**, our church community strived to support each other as we worshiped together.

119 We now worship joyfully in person with creative inspiring worship experiences such as this moving liturgical Earth Day dance in April of this year.

120 ADD A SLIDE: OUR PASTORS

CONCLUSION

Each of our pastors has loved and nurtured us using many talents and gifts to guide us in living out the transformative love of the kin-dom of God.. Using their wisdom and energy, they moved us forward as a congregation and individually. It wasn't always smooth sailing, but the journey was edifying and worthwhile. We are thankful for each of you.

121-132 (12 slides)

As retired Presbyterian Pastor Mark Wendorf, a former Westminster associate pastor, writes in his reflections: *“Congratulations on 150 years! My years of ministry (1980-85) were my very first in ministry. I was young, naive and made my fair share of mistakes. But, you were gracious and forgiving with me.”*

Retired Pastor Gordon Stewart, who served Westminster 1977-1983, shares in his reflection, *“If the walls of the Church House’s upper room could talk, they would tell the untold stories of church members, students, faculty, and administrators wrestling, like Jacob at the Jabbok, wrestling with the Presence we cannot see.*

But the walls of the upper room would tell more than the secret “dangers, toils, and snares” they hold in silence. They would gladly tell of the faith, courage, and resilience that sometimes, by grace alone, led to that deeper knowledge about God and ourselves....”

133 (logo) Westminster will continue to strive for peace and justice and to be an open and inclusive worship home. A current member in his reflections sums up Westminster's strength as follows: **"I am grateful that Westminster welcomes believers and seekers who listen to their "inner light" without fear of rebuke. I feel welcome in this church home that worships a God that knows me by name; that follows the teachings of Jesus and holds firm the belief that "goodness is stronger than evil; love is stronger than hate."**

Thank you for your kind attention