

# THE WITNESS

*The quarterly newsletter of Westwood Christian Church*



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## At a Glance

This quarter we have so much to celebrate, and so much to look forward to! In this quarter's *The Witness*, you can see some recap of 2023, read about the trip our teens took to SICOM, look to Ash Wednesday and Lent in 2024, and as always we provide you with a financial snapshot so you can be aware of how we are doing financially.

At the end of *The Witness* you can find a review of a book I read this quarter (what can I say I had a baby and read less theology), before a calendar for the next 3 months.

## 2023 Recap

This past year was a year worth celebrating. Let's look at some of the biggest and most celebration-worthy moments of 2023, quarter by quarter.

2022 ended with people becoming members of our community, and early 2023 continued the growth that we had seen in 2022. Our community saw attendance numbers that were higher than the same time in 2022, and those numbers are indicative of our family ministry serving more children in Sunday school, and involving more people in service. We were barraged by snow last winter which challenged some of our evening programs. We kicked off our search for our Family Minister.

The second quarter of 2023 was so much fun. We celebrated Easter with one of our highest attended Sundays before celebrating Westwood turning 65 in April. It was humbling to think about all that God has done through our church! This quarter saw four baptisms, adding their names to the over 3,000 people who have been baptized in our 65 year history. Praise the Lord. We also added 4 more members in this season.

The third quarter of 2023 was a challenging season for me, as Matthias was born after seven false alarms. But it was also a great time of serving and reaching out to our community. For Dane 2023 was a great time of partnership with Midvale Elementary School and Midvale Community Lutheran as 18 of our church joined together to serve in the name of bearing witness to God! We tried something new with a Trunk or Treat at Good Shepherd Lutheran, giving us something to build on for next year.

Fourth quarter was a time of focus on fellowship and growth. Our youth group went to SICOM (more below). We held a Thanksgiving lunch at church for anyone who wanted to eat together. We got together to decorate the church for Christmas, and we had cookies and coffee on Christmas Eve before we got together for worship.

Church is not all about numbers, but one of the most encouraging parts of 2023 was how our attendance continues to grow, year over year. We have almost fully recovered from the Covid slump. All but two weeks we were above last years average attendance, and 2023's attendance saw a 27% growth from 2022. May we continue that growth over the coming year!



**OUR NEW CHURCH  
SIGN!**



**WE HAD A GREAT TURNOUT  
FOR THANKSGIVING!**





## Student International Conference on Missions

Just as last year, one of the highlights of my year was leading a trip to SICOM, this year in Oklahoma City. It was too far to drive so Ashley Crutcher, Eva and Evan Quarm, Christopher and Christine Odoi, and I flew out early on Thursday morning to get there and flew out early on Sunday to get home. As exhausting as the 4 days are, I think they are worth it, and I hope that everyone who went does too.

This year, we joined hundreds of other students in worship, learning about how we can be “Truly Glad” based on sermons from 1 Peter 1:3-12. We were reminded what it means to be set apart, how to be content in the midst of pain, and were challenged to follow Jesus in every aspect of our lives.

In addition to seeing God’s work around the world by meeting and praying with missionaries, we got to go to some workshops to learn more about how to live on mission, we got to get our hands dirty (okay, we wore gloves) and pack boxes of meals for people in need, and we grew closer to one another through the time we spent together traveling, at meals, and in our hotel rooms. Thank you for your help sending our youth group to SICOM.



**WE PACKED A FEW THOUSAND MEALS FOR THOSE IN NEED!**



**GETTING READY FOR WORSHIP**



**EVERYONE ENJOYED WATCHING CHRIS GET ROASTED ON STAGE**



**IT WAS A FEW EARLY MORNINGS**

## Christmas

I had such a fun time celebrating Christmas with you this year! I wasn't sure how it would go having Christmas Eve service in the morning, with travelling and weather always threatening the celebration of Jesus' birth. Christmas Eve exceeded my expectations in every way. We had a full house, of both our members and regular attenders and their families, but we also had some community members come to check us out for the first time.

Christmas is always a good time to invite neighbors, friends, and family to come with you to go to church and we saw that. Another fun aspect of our Christmas season is our annual Christmas Offering. This year, over \$7,000 was given above and beyond your regular offering to help Rock River Christian Camp put a new roof on the Earth Lodge building! Be on the lookout for more information in the next few weeks to hear how much they were given this year and the timeline of that construction.



### CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP!

## Financial Snapshot

Thank you for your amazing support this past year. When we put the budget together in 2022, we anticipated our giving would be \$188,000. We came up just a bit short of that number at \$182,445.75, but even so, we ended the year in a healthy spot. In addition to our budgeted giving, around \$15,000 came in to the church through other gifts and modes of income. Our budgeted expenses were \$ 240,080 and we only spent 188,318.23. This was mostly due to us not hiring the Family Minister that we are looking to hire, which accounted for a significant portion of that gap.

Together, we raised almost 10,000 for Mountain Mission School and Rock River Christian Camp during Christmas and Easter. This is in addition to the \$20,700 that we give through our monthly missions giving.

In our reserves, we have a very healthy \$270,000 split between our checking account and some investment accounts in Christian Financial Resources and Church Development Fund.

Thank you for your faithful support of Westwood as we continue to look toward the future and what God has in front of us to do! If you would like to set up regular monthly giving, you can do so at [westwoodchristian.com/give](https://westwoodchristian.com/give).



## Ash Wednesday, Lent, and Easter 2024

It's hard to believe that Christmas has just passed and we are already looking to Lent and Easter but since Easter comes early this year, on March 31, so too does the season that leads up to it in Lent.

Romans 14:5-6 reads: *Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it for the Lord. Also those who eat, eat for the Lord, since they give thanks to God, while those who abstain, abstain for the Lord and give thanks to God.* If things like Lent, Ash Wednesday, or even Easter and Christmas are not helpful to you, then that's fine to ignore them. But if you observe them, make sure you are doing so for the Lord; make sure that it is done to help draw you into God's love and grace and life.

Lent is a season of fasting and penance that leads up to Easter. Lent is a 40 day period that leads up to Easter. Lent dates to the 4th Century AD as a way to prepare for Easter. Lent is designed to mimic two important moments of the Biblical story. First, it is a way that we are joined to Christ, who fasted 40 days in the desert. But it is also likened to the journey of Israel in the wilderness for 40 years on the way to the promise land as a result of their sin.

Lent is kicked off with Ash Wednesday, a day that, for many in our tradition, feels very foreign. Use of Ashes as a symbolic act of repentance and grief runs through the pages of the Scripture. When the King of Nineveh was convicted of his sin, he sat in ashes (Jonah 3:6). When Job is humbled by God, he sits in ashes (Job 42:6). Ashes were used because of what they symbolized. They symbolize dust and dirt, and when they are applied during an Ash Wednesday service, the words "remember you are dust and to dust you shall return" are spoken, just as God said them to Adam for his sin. For the tactile person, Ash Wednesday may be especially powerful.

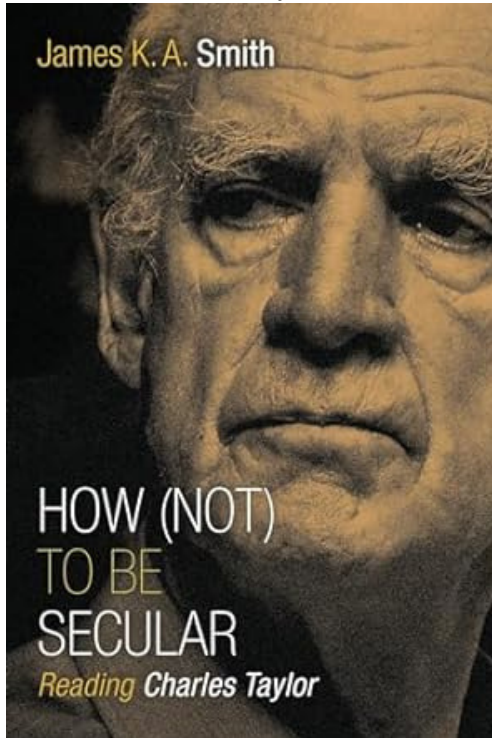
Ash Wednesday can help us remember that we need a savior because we are sinners. We have sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Rom 3:23).



But, importantly, the story doesn't end there. Lent is a guide to something: Easter. God's answer to our sin. Speaking of Easter, I am excited for this year! We are hoping to bring back our Easter Egg hunt, and we'll look to provide lunch that day as well for anyone who can come. Be on the lookout for more information about that in the months to come, but I am hopeful that we will have a great opportunity to share the good news of our Risen lord on Easter, and meet some of our neighbors. Our neighborhood is the real foyer of our church. May we use the coming months to welcome as many as we can into the celebration of Christ's victory over sin and death.

## Book Ends

*I had hoped to read more this last quarter, but between travelling for SICOM, Christmas and Thanksgiving, and the sickness that went through the house, I only managed to finish a book I had already started!*



*How (Not) to be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* by James K.A. Smith

This book was part of the discussion from of a cohort I was a part of when I first moved to Madison, called Missio Madison. I thought that I had read the whole thing in 2020, but recently realized I had only read about half of it. This book comes up regularly in breakfast talks I have with Wayne Shockley, because Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* was a groundbreaking tome when it was released in 2018. Jamie Smith wrote this to help readers of Charles by synthesizing and commenting on Taylor's work. The book is another tough read, and not very accessible to the average reader--in fact the cohort discussion in 2020 was full of people talking about how hard he was to understand. That said, the value of Taylor and Smith's work is great.

A few of the most important revelation of Charles Taylor's research and insight into the secular age that we live is that there are different kinds of secular ages. In fact, throughout history, Taylor identifies 3 different forms of secular ages (21-23). Further, Taylor asserts that counter to what we hear about the secular rejection of transcendence, just as Christians are often haunted by doubt, the unbeliever is often haunted by belief. It is because of this haunting that secular cultures find ways to replace their belief in God (that is, that something is transcendent) with other methods to escape the "immanent frame" (that is the natural world). Then, best of all, Smith's last chapter is titled "How (not) to Live in a Secular Age." It is not enough to understand our present, we must understand how to navigate it. Smith and Taylor are able captains for the journey.

One of my favorite things about Jamie Smith as a philosopher, theologian, and writer is his ruthless dedication to defining his terms, and regularly reminding readers what they mean. Additionally, this book has a glossary so that if, like me, you need to remind yourself of a term, it's easy to do.

Rather than reading James K.A. Smith's book, I think the better entry point to this discussion is his lecture to the Wheatley Institute, which you can find on YouTube. If you want to study more after that, then pick up the book.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-QPY6VLuEPQ>



## Next Quarter Calendar

Please note: some events may change

## JANUARY

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SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
31	1 Tom Sippy Birthday	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13 Junia Tomlinson Birthday Men's Breakfast Mug 'n' Muffin
14	15	16 Janet Anderson Birthday	17 Wednesday Walking	18	19	20
21 Nathanael Tomlinson Birthday Baptism Class	22	23	24 Roy Ratcliff Birthday Robert and Grace Odoi Anniversary Wednesday Walking	25	26	27 Rob Ehlers Birthday
28 Baptism Class	29	30	31 Ginger Rodgers Birthday Wednesday Walking	1	2	3

## FEBRUARY

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SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
28	29	30	31	1	2	3
4 Baptism Class Potluck after church	5 Erika Quarm Birthday	6	7 Wednesday Walking	8	9	10 Marion Greaser Birthday Men's Breakfast Mug 'n' Muffin
11 Worship Team Luncheon	12	13 Vikki Parrish Birthday	14 Ash Wednesday Service Wednesday Walking Linda Laufenberg Birthday	15 Bill Utter Birthday	16	17
18	19 Steven Mooberry Birthday	20	21 Wednesday Walking	22	23	24
25 Donna Johnson Lauren Tomlinson Birthday	26	27	28 Wednesday Walking	29	1	2

## MARCH

/ 2024

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
25	26	27	28	29	1	2
3 Keith Schoville Birthday Potluck after church	4	5 Linda Middlesworth Birthday	6 Wednesday Walking	7	8	9 Men's Breakfast Mug 'n' Muffin
10 Children's Team Luncheon	11	12 Christine Nandera (Odoi) Birthday	13 Wednesday Walking	14	15	16 Church Work Day
17	18	19	20 Wednesday Walking	21	22	23
24 Palm Sunday	25	26	27 Wednesday Walking	28 Maundy Thursday	29 Good Friday	30 Easter Egg Hunt And Lunch
31 Easter Sunday!	1	2	3 Wednesday Walking	4	5	6



**GRATUITOUS  
BABY PICTURE**

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