

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 will find a look back at the last quarter, with new members, ICOM, Christmas, and Thanksgiving, a look forward to all the opportunities to connect and serve over the coming 3 months, articles from Adam and Drew, and a look at our end of year financial status for 2024.

At the end of *The Witness* you can find some books we read, along with a calendar of the next few months, and pictures throughout of the last few months!

Financial Snapshot

Our financial situation ended incredibly strong in 2024. In addition to sending over \$3,500 to Unicoi Christian Church to bolster their response to community needs due to Hurricane Helene, we saw giving for 2024 go up almost 4% over 2023. Our total income for 2024 was \$216,009.

Our expenses for 2024 totaled \$219,082, which is more than our adjusted budget after hiring Drew, but it is considerably less than the budget we put forth in December of 2023. You can see that this means we were negative in cash flow by just over \$3,000 for the year.

Nonetheless, we are in a healthy place financially. We have over \$260,000 in our various accounts, much of which we will have access to this year should we need it for things like our lobby renovation, or should something catastrophic happen that would need to be paid for.

One of my favorite statistics about our finances is that we gave over \$26,800 to missions work. This means that we gave 12% of our total income and 14% of our total giving (income includes rentals, investments, and the like) to the work of spreading the gospel. If we are going to invite people to tithe (give 10% of their income to the church) then I want the church to model that as well, and I am always happy when we go beyond that number!

Thanks for helping us be a healthy church, and for supporting us faithfully. If you want to set up giving online, you can go to:

westwoodchristian.com/giving

New Members!

Justin and his wife, Rebecca, along with children (Benjamin, Elizabeth, and Jonah) placed their membership at Westwood in December. Justin is the Executive Director of Campus Collective Christian Ministries—the college ministry which Westwood has supported for a long time.

Justin has begun serving in our pulpit assistant team, with communion meditations, prayer, and Scripture reading, in addition to preaching occasionally.

They are about to welcome their fourth child this spring, so please reach out to see what they need, and congratulate them.



Look Back!

Adam Tomlinson

Attendance and New Members

2024 was an incredible year for Westwood. We baptized two people last year, had the Burge family place membership, but have also had a number of people come for a season, and some regular attenders who have not placed membership, but who have become part of our church home. God is moving in our community and I am so pleased to be a part of it. As such, our community grew by almost 10% last year. Church and faith is never measured by numbers alone, but they are indicative of things that are happening. If you see someone at church you don't know, chances are, they are new! Introduce yourself.

Trunk or Treat!

There are pictures of some of the cars later, but we didn't get a shot of all the cars, and pictures can't do justice to how much fun it was to partner with Good Shepherd Lutheran again for this event. Over 250 kids came through and got candy and smiles from nearly 30 cars. We had five families from Westwood decorate trunks to hand out candy and even more come to be a part of the event and help or just bring their kids. It's fun to be a light in the community for joy and kindness to people who live around our church.

ICOM

The International Conference on Missions (ICOM) has become a sort of tent-pole of our church's discipleship and annual calendar. Every year we dedicate thousands of dollars to ensure that people from Westwood can go learn about the work that God is doing all over the world, to encourage those missionaries, and to learn how we can bring the Good News to the lost who live in our neighborhoods. This year was our biggest year ever and so we decided to rent a bus to get our group to and from Lexington, KY. Especially fun this year was that a member of Roxbury Church of Christ, in Janesville, came with us and he has committed to inviting more of his church to join us next year.

In years past, our focus has been primarily on our teens attending SICOM (the student conference), but this year, we had a number of adults attend for their own edification and I look forward to more coming with us this coming year.

ICOM is a great opportunity to talk with missionaries all over the world doing all sorts of amazing work. From church planting, to sex trafficking liberation, to college ministries, to medical missions, to clean water and well-building, there is so much to learn and see and hear about what God is doing in the world and how God can use anyone to bring about his Kingdom on Earth as it is in heaven.

We have already hosted one lunch and have two more on the calendar to help those who went to ICOM debrief, take action, and continue the work that God has begun in their lives. You'll hear more about how you can attend ICOM this spring.

Christmas Eve Service

Christmas Eve is always a stressful and busy time as a minister—who am I kidding, it's stressful and busy for everyone. But our annual Christmas Eve service is perennially one of my favorite days of the year. We were blessed with a full house for carols, Scripture reading, candles, and it was a wonderful celebration of Jesus' birth, and our eternal hope that he will come again. Go tell it on the mountain!

Response to ALCS

The most shocking thing to happen in all of last year is likely going to be the shooting at Abundant Life Christian School on December 16. While none of our students attend there, we all felt the fear, sadness, rage, and depravity of the event. I was so pleased that Westwood was able to come together with other churches to pray, offer support, and look for opportunities to help the families who were impacted. Please continue to pray for ALCS, City Church, and everyone else involved.

2025 Youth and Family Ministry Plans

Drew Larson

Both Adam and I are eagerly anticipating what God will do in the lives of our youth and families at Westwood. I'm writing this update near the end of January, and already we have things to celebrate! Two of our 6th-12th graders recently spent a weekend at Rock River Christian Camp, having fun and worshipping Jesus with over 50 of their peers; as well, we are excited to welcome the birth of two new children to Westwood families between now and April. And these things are just a foretaste of how we pray God will work in our youth and families this year!

This year, we'll continue inviting students to transformational experiences like Rock River's week-long summer camp and ICOM in the fall, just as we did in 2024. Through the spring, we'll also continue offering drop-in Bible study on Sunday mornings for anyone who is interested.

Additionally, we're building new partnerships with other youth ministries in Madison so that our middle/high schoolers can enjoy friendship, worship, and Scripture study with other Christians their age. And I'll be setting up regular times of individual/small-group discipleship for any 6th-12th grader that's interested taking new steps of faith or exploring Jesus more deeply.

For our families, we'll have traditional events like our Easter egg hunt and the Trunk-or-treat partnership with Good Shepherd, as well some new potential activities. We're also exploring new ways to share resources for parents and grandparents so that they can grow even more as disciplers of their children, such as a 'Family Resources' tab on our website. More on this in the spring and summer!

It is a true privilege to come alongside the youth and families of Westwood as they walk with Jesus. I am honored to serve our community in this way, and to bear witness with you to the spiritual breakthroughs we trust Jesus will give in this new year.

Looking Forward

We have so much to look forward to this coming quarter! I hope you'll join us for the special opportunities for evangelism, service, discipleship, fellowship, and church unity!

Family Ministry Team Growth

We are currently looking for three or more people to join our Family Ministry team to teach our PreK-5th graders. Our goal is to have two teachers in every classroom and in order to do that our team has to grow. We'd love to have you consider joining! We'll train you, and our goal is to not have people feel like they are alone. Our curriculum is designed to be easy to use, and comes with a teaching guide so you don't have to "make it up" yourself! We have a team lunch on February 9, so even if you're not on the team, but want to learn more we'd love to have you join us.

If you are interested in joining this team, please Drew Larson know! Drew@westwoodchristian.com

Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday falls on **March 5** this year. We've tried to do Ash Wednesday a few different ways over the last 3 years, and this year we will likely try a more self-led approach to the day. The plan is to put a booklet together that will allow each of us to process through the parts of Ash Wednesday—confession, repentance, and prayer—and then Drew and Adam will be available to impose ashes on those who wish to have that done. This will allow people to come and go through the experience at a time of day that works for them. We're still working on the details, but they'll be available soon.

We know that Ash Wednesday is weird for some people. It feels very Roman Catholic, and understandably, the Bible never commands us to do it. However, for those of us who have ventured into the shallow waters of this tradition, Ash Wednesday has become a day that helps us remember our need for Jesus' life, death, and resurrection and serves to jumpstart the season of preparation that precedes Easter.

Kingdom Justice Summit

Kingdom Justice Summit is a two day event that takes place on March 7 and 8. March 7 is a dinner opportunity where people from all over the city are grouped by where they live to eat with each other and to discuss issues of justice and the Kingdom. March 8, at Upper House, is a day-long event with speakers and breakout sessions exploring issues of justice and the Church. This year's focus is on poverty and the Church and we are looking forward to being challenged and encouraged in our longing to help people in Madison experience the abundant life for which Jesus said he came. It's exciting to be a sponsor this year for an ecumenical conference that is dedicated to practical education for all Christians, not just church leaders. I hope you'll join us! Register at www.kingdomjusticesummit.com/register-2025

Short Term Mission/Work Trip

Adam is working to put together an opportunity to go to Eastern Tennessee and work alongside IDES and the churches there to help them continue their efforts. This trip will be open to anyone, over the age of 15, younger with parent companions. If you are interested in being a part of this trip, please let Adam know as soon as possible so we can get the dates nailed down.

Passover Seder

Last year, Anna Marie and Todd Morra led those who were interested in eating traditional Passover *seder* meal and have expressed their desire to do so again. Passover begins at sundown on April 12, and the *seder* is typically eaten within 24 hours of the beginning of Passover. We are working on what time the meal will be, but on Sunday April 13, Westwood will host a *seder*. It's a wonderful service and I think attending will help you understand the events of Holy Week that lead up to and include Jesus' death. One cool aspect is that the order of the meal is basically unchanged for the last 2,000 years, so what we do in this is very similar to what Jesus and his disciple did when they ate the Passover in the Upper Room.

Easter Egg Hunt

Our Egg Hunt was well attended last year and we hope to do it again this year! The Egg Hunt will likely be on April 19, the Saturday between Good Friday and Easter. While we won't need very many eggs donated, we will need candy and lots of help stuffing eggs! Please plan to:

- i. Donate candy for our Egg Hunt
- ii. Volunteer to help
- iii. Invite your friends and neighbors with kids to come

Last year, we served a meal with the Hunt and it was a great opportunity to let people come experience the community of our church in a non-threatening way. I had a neighbor tell me that he liked our church. This is a subtle but critical reason things like this are helpful. Many people have an idea of the church. For those who don't come to church, that picture is often negative and things like an egg hunt and lunch offer an easy way for us to show how that image doesn't fit us.

Holy Week Plans

We will of course have lots to do leading up to Easter, including a Good Friday experience. We will of course do those things again. Be on the lookout for information regarding Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter morning. We'll have all that to you by late May so you can invite people to attend with you.

The Seats of Honor

Adam Tomlinson

In Luke 14:8 Jesus says “When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host,” This teaching launches a discussion on humility, hubris, and how to live in the Kingdom of God. The teaching is both good advice for people in Jesus’ day—we are told that he saw people jockeying for the places of honor—and it is good advice for us today, though our seats of honor have changed.

Sometimes I think we can over-spiritualize Jesus to think that his advice and teaching, which was very much grounded in a real situation and physical chairs, is only about our hearts and pride. But I think there is something in this passage that we need to see and hear anew, and that comes into how we understand seats of honor in our churches. Yes, that means where you sit in the sanctuary.

A few hundred years ago, the seats of honor in church were the seats closest to the front. This makes sense contextually. One who sat in the front got to be seen by more people, got to sit in pews and boxes that were warmer because they were in the middle of the room, not by the windows, and most importantly, got to hear the priest easiest and receive communion first. To these people, Jesus says “the last will go first and the first will go last.”

But today, in a world with audio-visual capabilities, the seats of honor have shifted. No longer are the most desirable seats in the front. The most desired seats are those on the aisles and at the back of the sanctuary. You know this from your own experience. When someone comes to church for the first time, studies and stories from pastors show they often want to sit near the back so they can slip in and out easily. If something happens and they feel uncomfortable, they can get out without anyone seeing them. Mothers and fathers with children see the back as an easy way to slip out if a child becomes uneasy. And even those who are not new or parents, sometimes things happen and you are running late.

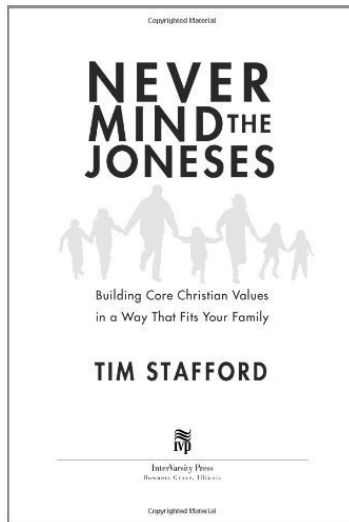
You may have seen the signs in the church asking you to sit as close to the front as possible and wondered “Why should I sit closer to the front?” I hope you are now seeing that where you sit in church is one way to live out the teaching of Jesus. We likely aren’t going to ask you to get up and move on a Sunday—though sometimes we are asked to scooch in—but the lesson still applies: the seats of honor are for those whom we want to be comfortable.

“But I want to be comfortable,” you say. I know. I get it. But what if you sitting closer to the stage will help someone exploring faith feel comfortable learning about Jesus? What if you sitting closer will empower us to show people that there is room for them in our church? It really is that simple. Where we sit communicates how we feel about ourselves and others, and is part of how we communicate our welcome to those who are otherwise unsure if they “fit” at Westwood.

Book Ends

Leaders should be readers. Here are the best books that Drew and Adam read last quarter!

Never Mind the Joneses by Tim Stafford



One of the predictable ways that family ministry goes wrong is by implying (or sometimes saying explicitly!) that there is One Best Way to build a Jesus-shaped family culture. As with most things, however, there isn't a single 'best' way to disciple your children; rather, there are simply ways that are better or worse for your specific family.

Tim Stafford's book, "Never Mind the Joneses", builds on this core insight to write a sensible, practical guide for crafting a Jesus-shaped culture in your home—one that reflects who you are and what you sense God has called your family to become. "God knows who you are, and he knows who your kids are," Stafford says, "He wants you to find the

way that belongs uniquely to you." To that end, this book explores different Christian values and gives parents a menu of rhythms and practices they can experiment with for each one, finding what works best for each individual family.

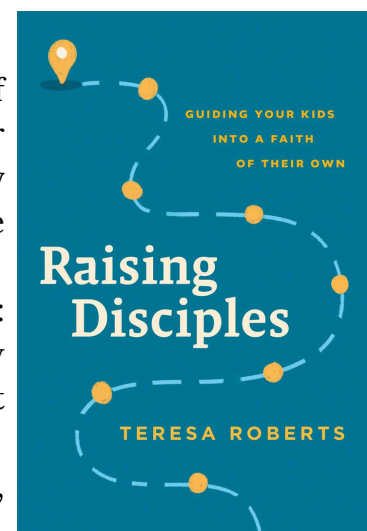
Rejecting this One Best Way mindset, Stafford says, frees parents from a fearful, anxious mindset about passing on Christian values to their children. Because there is no One Best Way, you have the freedom to explore what works best for your family. In that place of freedom, you can build a family culture that is life-giving, satisfying, and (best of all!) effective at growing you and your children into lifelong disciples of Jesus.

Raising Disciples: Guiding Your Kids into a Faith of Their Own by Dr. Teresa Roberts

Dr. Teresa Roberts, here, does a splendid job of synthesizing lessons from decades of ministry, study, and her own spiritual journey in order to help parents, ministry leaders, and friendly Christians how to purposely raise children to love Jesus.

Of specific help, here, is the focus Teresa places on time: the first 13 years of life. Many resources attempt in too few pages to cover too large a life span, and Teresa avoids that pitfall by staying focused.

The tips and questions she poses are helpful and practical, and yet are also well-informed. As a scholar, Teresa is not content with only her own story or experiences, though the book is sprinkled with anecdotes and comments from her expertise, and is instead well informed by others, researched and cited throughout. We are hoping to have Teresa come lead a workshop at Westwood to help us implement some of this work!



Church Life Pictures!

Have pictures of life around church? Send them to Adam!



Trunk or Treat was so much fun!



**Thanksgiving Lunch
was splendid.
I hope you'll
join us next year!**





Worship and Sessions at ICOM Were Great!

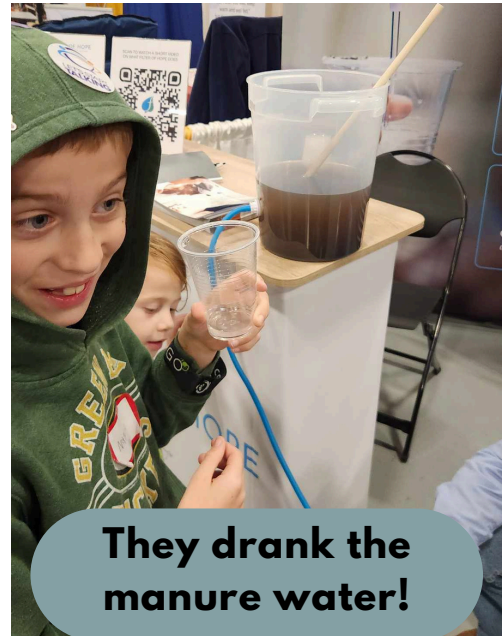


Packing meals for families in need all over the world!



We had fun on the bus!

**Plan to join us this
November 20-23
for ICOM 2025**



**They drank the
manure water!**

Next Quarter Calendar

Please note: some events may change

FEBRUARY 2025

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
						1
2	3	4	5 Erika Quarm Birthday	6	7	8 MEN'S BREAKFAST MUG 'N' MUFFIN
9 FAMILY MINISTRY TEAM LUNCH	10 Marion Greaser Birthday	11	12	13 Vikki Parrish Birthday	14 Linda Laufenberg Birthday	15 Bill Uter Birthday
16	17	18 Logan Davison Birthday	19 Steven Mooberry Birthday	20	21 Lue Sturdevant Birthday	22
23 ICOM 2024 DEBRIEF LUNCH #2	24 Robert and Grace Odoi Anniversary	25 Donna Johnson Lauren Tomlinson Birthday	26	27	28	

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
						1
2	3 Keith Schoville Birthday	4	5 Linda Middlesworth Birthday ASH WEDNESDAY	6	7	8 MEN'S BREAKFAST MUG 'N' MUFFIN KINGDOM JUSTICE SUMMIT
9	10	11	12 Christine Nandera Birthday	13	14	15
16 POTLUCK	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27 Ernie and Rina Dunn Anniversary	28	29
30	31					

APRIL 2025

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1	2 Al Lynk Birthday	3	4	5 Ed Mooberry Birthday
6	7	8	9	10	11	12 MEN'S BREAKFAST MUG 'N' MUFFIN
13 PASSOVER SEDER MEAL	14 Paul Utley Rina Dunn Birthday	15 Marilyn Greaser Birthday	16	17 Meg Schaeffer-Utter Birthday	18 GOOD FRIDAY	19 Brianna Lee Birthday EASTER EGG HUNT
20 EASTER	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28 Carolyn Cash Birthday	29	30			



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