



47 Jefferson Ave. SE • Grand Rapids, MI 49503 • (616) 456-1456 • www.wpcgr.org

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Some days I cannot quite put my finger on why I love Westminster so much. New members speak of our Westminster Welcome, of our worship, our music, of our genuine commitment to serving the community; they speak of our inclusion, our missions, our young people—and those gifts stir me, too. They are gifts more rare than they ought to be in this world.

But still I cannot always put my finger on why I love Westminster so much. I know full well that we don't get everything right. I know we make our mistakes. We have our limitations. But there is here at Westminster what Wendell Berry once named *a will toward good will*. And maybe that is it. In describing a fictional congregation in his novel *Jayber Crow*, Berry wrote:

What I saw now was the community imperfect and irresolute but held together by the frayed and always fraying, incomplete and yet ever-holding bonds of the various sorts of affection. It was a community... always failing and yet always preserving a kind of will toward good will.

Always preserving a kind of *will toward good will*—I see it, and it is not only an inclination but a will acted upon. I believe that Westminster at its best has come into being through a thousand, thousand decisions (large and small) made by thousands of individuals over 153 years. Westminster is myriad decisions made by committees and sessions, deacons and trustees, all inching their way toward something that is bigger than us all. It has been thousands of nights of preachers seeking to be as honest as they can be, thousands of elders setting aside their own agendas, getting past their own limits to lead us to serve the greater community, thousands of parishioners making pledges, making promises, and keeping them.

Westminster is people actually being at the greeter's desk or the food pantry, showing up for choir rehearsal, really welcoming someone back who's been away—without judgment. It's thousands of decisions, letting their better angels hold sway for a moment of real choice. Thousands showing up on Sunday and joining their voices to sing, allowing their voice to be “lost” in the chorus, and inspiring one another by those “various sorts of affection” to more of that same trust and love.

Westminster has come into being and persists in ministry, because generations upon generations have given their money away to it, given their time, talent, and treasure to the church, freely, voluntarily, *willingly* “losing” it for the hope that we might be a faithful witness to God's love. And in that giving a church has come into being and, God willing, become faithful. There's a lot of trust in that giving—trust in the leadership, trust in this institution—traits very much on the wane in our wider culture these days.

I give to Westminster, because I've never seen anything like it, and I do not want it ever to go away. And I want it to flourish and continue to strive to be better than it is today, more faithful, more loving, more just and more generous. I give because I love this community. You inspire me to be more faithful. You have shown me how we can be “held together by the frayed and always fraying, incomplete and yet ever-holding bonds of the various sorts of affection.” You have shown me how to be “always failing and yet always preserving a kind of will toward good will.” God bless you, Westminster. Join the generations' commitment and bring your very real pledge in the celebration on October 26!

Grace and peace,

Rev. Chandler Stokes