



# Westminster

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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## A Message from Rev. Julie Emery

May 23, 2024

*"God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good... On the sixth day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation."*

Dear Westminster Church,

This spring marks 10 years since I was first introduced to Westminster Presbyterian Church. I had driven up from my former congregation in New York to meet with a small team of faithful members of our church, to consider whether God might be calling us to join together in ministry. I remember a fruitful conversation about how ministry with families had changed drastically - even then. I remember a tour of our expansive building that included spying on a brief worship service in the chapel and a food-packing mission event in the Fellowship Hall. There was excitement and energy and connection.

A lot has happened in ten years. As you know, I did feel that God was calling us into ministry together, and I began my time as pastor at Westminster in October 2014. We have had many more exciting and energetic events and mission experiences. We have gone through many transitions - with staff, programming, and in faithful life together. And through it all, I have continued to feel God's presence and leading for us and our ministry here, it has been... "very good."

Many of you are aware that our Presbytery encourages congregations and pastors to take a time of Sabbatical (generally 3-4 months) after

every 6th year of ministry. And a sabbatical time is a part of my terms of call and covenant with Westminster. If you do the math, that timing would have meant my sabbatical should have been in 2020. For obvious reasons, I opted to postpone my sabbatical to a better time. Along with my family and the Ministerial Relations and Personnel Committee (MR&P) we have discerned that the 'better time' will begin on June 10.

I know that there will be many questions about this time. Below is a list of FAQ that I anticipate will be most pressing. The Session and especially MR&P Elder Janet Wade-Utay, have been walking alongside me in my planning and will continue to be available for additional questions. Above all, I am deeply grateful to the leadership of Westminster for this time, and for the space this offers to renew my spirit and reconnect with my faith and calling.

In Christ,

Julie

## Sabbatical FAQ

### **How long will Rev. Julie be on sabbatical?**

Rev. Julie's last Sunday will be June 9, Music Appreciation Sunday. She will return to the office on September 30 and will be back in worship on October 6.

### **Who will take over pastoral responsibilities while Rev. Julie is away?**

Rev. Jinny Smanik has agreed to serve Westminster as the Sabbatical Pastor during the time that Julie is away. She will be responsible for moderating the Session, supervising and supporting the staff, leading worship and responding to pastoral emergencies.

### **What are the financial implications of this sabbatical time?**

The congregation is responsible for continuing to provide Rev. Julie's salary while she is on sabbatical. Rev. Jinny's salary will be paid through a restricted sabbatical fund that was created in 2015 and has been built up through the gifts of forward-thinking and generous members throughout the years to provide for the anticipated sabbatical time. All non-budgeted sabbatical expenses will be funded through this Pastor's Sabbatical Restricted Fund.

### **What is a sabbatical for? What will Rev. Julie be doing?**

Sabbatical time is intended to be a time of rest and renewal, connecting with the Spirit of God and re-energizing a pastor's joy and love for ministry. A sabbatical may include a time of vacation, but it is different from a vacation. A sabbatical is instead an intentional time of refreshment and restoration. It is, as David Alves writes, "A time for drawing closer and listening more carefully, with the intent of deeper intimacy with God."

The Hebrew word "*shabbat*," really means "stopping or ceasing." So what God really calls for in sabbatical time is to stop our *usual* labor. This means that Rev. Julie will have a chance to cease the regular daily routines and fall into a different rhythm of being. This new rhythm will include time camping, traveling in New England and writing. She will be attending a retreat at Linwood Spiritual Center in Rhinebeck, NY and

will spend some extended time in Michigan. And in the midst of these things, she will be setting aside time to enjoy and connect with her family before her oldest son leaves for college in the fall.

Additionally, Rev. Julie is beginning a Doctoral of Ministry program (D.Min.) through Pittsburgh Theological Seminary with a concentration in Public Theology and Creative Writing. She will spend a week in Pittsburgh in June to begin her program, and will begin an online course in the craft of writing in August.

**Will we be able to see or connect with Rev. Julie while she is on sabbatical?**

No. The sabbatical time is intended to be a time for a pastor and their congregation to take a break from one another; to disconnect from the “usual” responsibilities and tasks that make up our daily life. In order to do that well, Rev. Julie needs to maintain clear boundaries, so that she can truly step back from life at Westminster. If she is able, she will send occasional updates to Rev. Smanik to share with the congregation, but we ask that the congregation members respect those boundaries and allow Rev. Julie the time to unplug and rest.

**What if something REALLY important happens? Will Rev. Julie come back?**

No. We are in good hands and under good care with Rev. Jinny Smanik. She, the staff and the faithful leaders of our Session will be able to care for us and guide us through whatever might happen in the next few months.

**How can we support Westminster and Rev. Julie during this time?**

The sabbatical time for a pastor is an opportunity for the congregation to seek renewal and reconnection with God. During this time, Rev. Jinny will be leading the congregation in a time of reconnecting with our own stories of faith both individually and as a church. We invite you to be intentional in your worship, your prayer life, and your engagement throughout this time, so that these months might bring us all an experience of renewal and refreshment.

Any questions about Julie's upcoming sabbatical, please contact Janet Wade-Utay at [MainSt.chef10@gmail.com](mailto:MainSt.chef10@gmail.com)

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Westminster Presbyterian Church | 2080 Boulevard | West Hartford, CT 06107 US

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