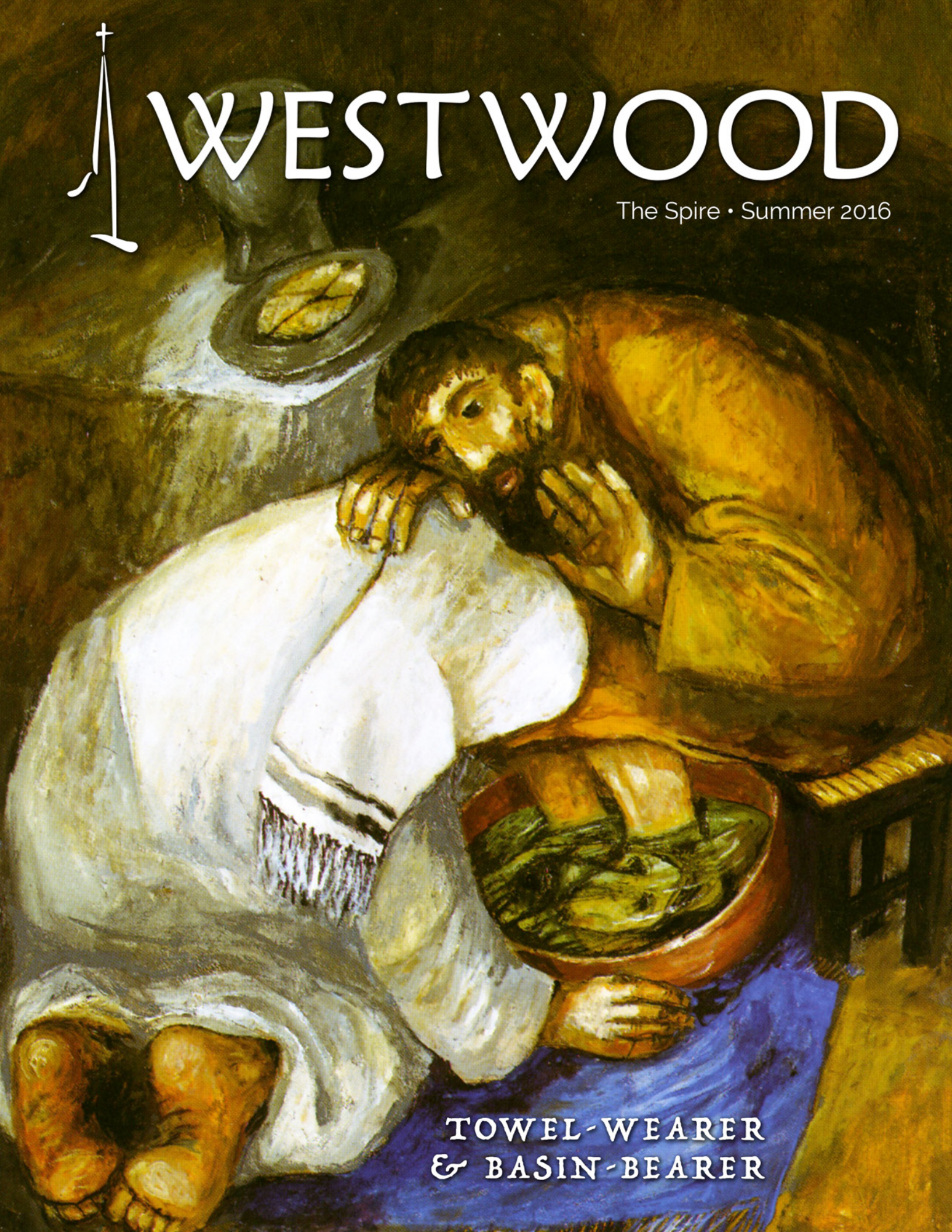




WESTWOOD

The Spire • Summer 2016



TOWEL-WEARER
& BASIN-BEARER

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COVER IMAGE

“The Washing Of The Feet”

by Fr. Seiger Koder (Germany)
01.03.1925 - 02.09.2015



In John 13:1-7, we are told that Jesus wrapped a towel around his waist and removed his outer clothing, and in Köder's picture, he is shown with a tasselled and blue striped cloth over him - reminiscent of a Jewish prayer shawl and symbolic of a holy act. As he is kneeling at Peter's feet, we only see a glimpse of Jesus' face in the reflection of water in the basin. Peter protested at the thought of Jesus lowering himself to such an act of service.

For the second time that night, Jesus encouraged them to follow his example by saying that they too were to wash the feet of others. In seeing Jesus' face in the reflection of the water, the artist mirrors this theme. In acts of service, we can see the face of God and glimpse God's glory.

WESTWOOD UMC
10497 Wilshire Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90024

OFFICE HOURS:
Monday-Friday (9am-5pm)
310.474.4511
wumc@westwoodumc.org

STAFF:
Pastor John Woodall
Senior Pastor
john@westwoodumc.org



Kathy Cannon
Administration &
Creative Connections
kathy@westwoodumc.org

Pastor Chris Spearman
Minister of Adult Programs
chris@westwoodumc.org

Bo Sanders
Dir. of Children, Youth, Families
bosanders@westwoodumc.org

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Becoming a Towel-Wearer & Basin-Bearer

Even though it was over three decades ago, I still have vivid memories of my first day at seminary. It was a “Foundations for Ministry” class which was required for all new students. The first words out of the professor's mouth caught all of us off guard, “Do you realize that you are called to nothing more than being a servant?” It almost felt like the air went out of the room. Sure, we all knew the story of Jesus washing the disciples feet in the gospel narrative and how his call was to be a servant. But let's be honest, everyone in that classroom had come from a local church that was excited beyond belief that one of their young people felt called to ministry. Our egos, shall we say, were a bit puffed up – yes, we thought we were hot stuff. That statement about servant-hood let the air out of a lot of balloons.

Thirty six years later, if I were teaching that class, I would say the same thing. Following Jesus is not about status; it is about being involved in the messiness of life. I have been blessed by the most amazing teachers in the ensuing years – most not having any seminary education. They have been the incredible lay people who have called each of those congregations home. They are the people who have grabbed ahold of the vision what it means to be a follower of Jesus who serves the needs of people around them. Some of them have been the teachers and youth leaders committed to mentoring another generation, some are the worship leaders through spoken word and music, and some have been the persons who make mission a reality addressing the hurts and hopes of the community and world. They have made a lasting impression on me.

Here at Westwood, we have an amazing array of persons who have been called to follow Jesus and serve the people around them. This issue of the Spire magazine shares just a few of those stories. My prayer is that these stories prompt all of us to continually ask the question, “How is God asking me to serve?”

PASTOR JOHN WOODALL has been serving United Methodist Congregations for over thirty years in a number of capacities; Youth Minister, Education Minister, Minister of Evangelism, and now Senior Pastor. He is a graduate of the University of Southern California and Fuller Theological Seminary, and he and his spouse, Linda, have three young adult children (Mark, Elizabeth, Peter). When not at church, you might find him working in the garden, trying out new recipes, attending concerts, reading a good book, working a crossword, or sitting at the piano.

CELEBRATING

“Praise the Lord! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens! Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his excellent greatness! Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals!” - Psalm 150:1-6 (NIV)

“His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’” Matthew 25:21 (ESV)

ALEX SMITH | *Serves as AV Team Leader for The Loft*

What brought you to Westwood UMC and The Loft?

I’ve been a member of Westwood United Methodist since 2005. When I moved from Louisiana, my parents wanted to make sure I found a good home base for a church. I found Westwood on the Internet, and I’ve been with the church since 2005. Our small groups were the beginnings of The Loft, and I was very happy to be part of that.

What is it about The Loft that you connect with?

Similar to The Sanctuary service, it’s a community of people. Going to church never feels like a chore or something that I’m obligated to do. I’m excited to do it, because I’m around people I genuinely enjoy and I’m growing with. From a spiritual standpoint, I think that I’ve grown exponentially since The Loft’s inception. We’ve been going deeper into our tradition and our heritage as we move forward as Christians in this new kind of world we’re living in.

How did you get involved in serving at The Loft?

A need! That’s one of the best things about our church. If there’s a need, you could possibly be the one to fill it. Chris and Bo approached me about being part of The Loft leadership, and I was very grateful. I saw that Chris was trying to manage the technical aspect of the gathering, and I wanted to offer my services.

Was audio / video part of your background?

I went to film school, so I was very familiar. Once Chris ran me through it, it was very easy. You’re helping set the tone for the service and the emotional experience people are having.

What do you enjoy the most about serving?

People like having a sense of purpose. It’s like you’re contributing to your community. I really gravitated toward it, because I was helping out. There was a need there, and I wanted to help fill it. In the process, I’ve ended up training a couple of more people that have taken that role when I’m not there. It’s great, because it allows me to move around The Loft and talk to newer folks and build relationships.

What are your hopes for The Loft for the next year or two?

I hope that we become a safe place for people, a place where they can start over again. They may have had a difficult experience with church and spirituality, but The Loft through Westwood could be a place for them to start over. My hope is more than growth *by* individuals, but that we would have growth *within* the individual. My hope is that we have more people who are feeling a sense of ownership of the space. This isn’t just the people who started The Loft or Chris and Bo. This is our space together, and we are building community together.



ANNA ALLGYER | *Serves in Youth Choir and as an Acolyte*

How did you get connected to the Westwood church family?

My parents have been going since before I was born, so they brought me. I was baptized when I was a little kid, and I’ve been there every since.

If you described Westwood to a friend, what would you tell them?

I’d say it is an inclusive community where there are a bajillion different ministries you can take part in. It’s a really friendly community that feels like home.

How were you first introduced to choir?

I went to preschool at Westwood United Methodist Preschool, and I did the Christmas concerts and then moved into the youth choir when I was in elementary school.

What do you enjoy about it?

I just remember having a lot of fun when I was in preschool. Choir is a big part of life. I’m in the church choir, school choir, acapella group, and the National Children’s Chorus. Music has always been a passion of mine. It’s choir, but we also do chimes during the Summer. I have just been doing it my whole life, and it’s really comfortable. I really just love putting myself out there and getting an opportunity to sing regularly. It’s a lot of fun with the group. I know the girls from youth ministry and SSP as well, so it’s really inclusive and fun.

On your own time, what do you like to listen to?

On my own, I do listen to a lot of classical music but mostly for studying, but I’m pretty open. A lot of old music, but new music as well.

Is there a favorite song you sing as part of the choir?

Every couple of years, we bring back Majesty for Easter or a big event. It’s just a really beautiful song, and I love hearing everybody cycling through and hearing the solos. It’s really just a great song.





JEREMY LANGE | Serves as a member of *Two or More*

How did you get connected at Westwood?

My wife, Stephanie, and I moved to Los Angeles in 2007, and she has been a Methodist her whole life. We went to a few Methodist churches on the westside of LA, and we found Westwood and attended a few times. When we saw the band *Two or More* perform, we both really enjoyed their performances. That was part of the reason why we decided on Westwood. We both really felt at home. I wasn't part of a faith community growing up. We've been members at Westwood for about four or five years now.

Tell me how you got involved in *Two or More*.

After seeing the band perform a few times, I was having a jam session with Ralph Barlow. Some of the band members approached me after that and recruited me to sit in on a Bob Dylan song. If they wanted me to play on a Bob Dylan song, it was really easy for me to make that decision. I'm a harmonica player, and Bob Dylan is one of my favorite artists of all time. I was a guest musician for a few performances, and then I became a regular member. Then, the same thing happened with my wife, who is a vocalist. One thing that I really enjoy that not everyone knows is that we rehearse once a week and perform once a month. Each week revolves around food, fellowship, and rehearsal for our next performance. We've definitely found our home and found our family. Since I've been playing music with them, I've also been able to help out the youth choir and the main Sanctuary choir. If they need a drummer, a percussionist, or harmonica player, I'm always happy to sit in and help out.

How has being part of the *Two or More* community impacted your spiritual growth?

We were invited to perform at Jane Voigts' church in San Luis Obispo, and that's when I had that moment when I experienced something. In that very moment of seeing the beauty of the scenery and watching the band perform, and that's when I knew I wanted to be with Stephanie forever and I definitely had that spiritual moment where I was really thankful to be part of something special within our faith community. It helped me make some big discoveries along the way. It was a coming to God moment if you want to call it that. We spend a lot of time together, and we share prayers for the entire church community. Many of the *Two or More* members are involved in other ministries, and they give us the updates. We share in celebration, heartbreaks, and everything that goes with it.



ASHLEY & EMILY KISHIBAY

| Twin sisters serving as Acolytes and in the Youth Choir

How did you become part of the Westwood family?

Emily: We came together as a family. I think our parents have been going before we were born. **Ashley:** Yep!

If someone has never attended Westwood, how would you describe the church to them?

Emily: It's really entertaining. The people make it really fun, especially the kids. They are always smiling, and everyone is happy to be there. **Ashley:** I would say that it's inclusive - especially listening to the sermons and the activities after church. It really brings us together as a community.

How long have you been Acolytes?

Emily & Ashley: Since sixth grade. **Emily:** That's when they say you can start doing it.



When you got started, what did you understand being an Acolyte was all about?

Ashley: To make the services more...celebratory? **Emily:** Celebratory! You're bringing the light of Christ, the flame. You're bringing the Cross. You're bringing the Bible. It makes it more celebratory of God.

How do you determine who carries which item down the aisle?

Emily: I used to do the Cross, because I don't like doing the lights. It just bothered me, because of the wax dropping. If you hold it a certain way, it will drop on you, and I had that happen one time. It dropped right near my eye, and it was so close.

Not to be sacrilegious, but is one of the positions seen as more favorable than the others?

Ashley: I feel like the Cross is the highest position. Ahem. (laughter) **Emily:** I really like doing the Bible, because it used to be ginormous. It was like you were holding a baby. You'd have to hold it above your head, and your arms would get tired. **Ashley:** I feel like the Cross is seen as the most important, because it starts it off. People are the most nervous about it, because you're the person in front and listening to the cues.

As 6th graders, were you scared to carry fire down the aisle?

Ashley: We were really afraid that the flame would go out. **Emily:** We were also really afraid of setting the church on fire. **Ashley:** That too! **Emily:** You get little embers coming off of it. What if it falls, ya know? They do fall, but they're extinguished before they hit the ground.



Ashley & Emily Kishibay

Why is being an Acolyte meaningful to you?

Emily: I think it's because we've been doing it for so long. It's been a tradition for us, and now that we're leaving, it's going to be different not doing it. **Ashley:** At first, it wasn't something we wanted to do, because it meant getting to church earlier. For kids, it's very difficult. Watching the services without it just doesn't feel right.

As you head off to college, what will you miss about being an Acolyte at Westwood?

Ashley: The songs and Pastor John's sermons are really engaging and interesting. I really enjoy those. I've visited other churches through the years, and I don't think that I've ever experienced a pastor that has engaged me in the same way. **Emily:** Or who has challenged our worldviews. It will be strange trying to find a church like Westwood. I'll probably listen to the podcasts.



WELCOMING

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, 24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.” Colossians 3:23-24 (NIV)

“I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” Matthew 25: 35 (NIV)

KERI FITZGERALD | Serves by overseeing Cafe W

How did you and your family come to Westwood UMC?

It was a long, long time ago. We had two kids. My son was around three, and my daughter had just been born. We wanted to bring them up in a church community. Both my husband and I had a mixed bag of feelings about our own church upbringing. The general rule was that it couldn't be Baptist, and it couldn't be Catholic. We went with an open mind to a lot of different churches. The day I walked into the sanctuary at Westwood, I was holding my daughter, and the first thought that popped into my head was, “This would be a great place for her to get married one day.” Actually, the sanctuary and the physical plant spoke to me initially. Within a few minutes, we realized there were two strong, super-smart female ministers who were running the ship at that point, and they had insightful and challenging things to say to us. We've been there ever since. Around 18 years ago.

How would you describe the congregation and Sunday experience to someone?

I generally describe it as not a place of religiosity, because that's usually someone's biggest fear. I say it's place of really smart people that I like to hang out with. That's actually how I describe it. It's a good place to drop into no matter where you are on your spiritual journey. It's very welcoming for the questioning. For me, I like to cook, like to eat, like to socialize, and like to sing, and all those other activities are enhanced by theological and spiritual conversations.

How did Cafe W get started?

Cafe W originated during the construction of Belmont Village, because our large congregation was used to a large parking lot. We were still going to have a large congregation with zero parking lot, and we were going to have to transport people in batches. John said, “As long as they have to come early, feed them.” It started a purely logistical solution. We wanted to give people some reason to be there early. It came about by meeting a specific need, and it evolved into a staple of community engagement and fellowship. Anywhere from 20 and up to 40 or 50 people eat breakfast each Sunday.

What is meaningful for you about serving in Cafe W?

I enjoy it. I enjoy the camaraderie, and I love the cooks. The cooks are great people. There's nothing better than looking out into Wesley Room and hearing the noise and laughter of people eating and having a great time.



NANCY RICHARDSON | Serves by leading Westwood's involvement at P.A.T.H.

How did you get connected at Westwood UMC?

We moved to Los Angeles in 1978 and went church shopping, but didn't find a place that resonated with us. We had been worshipping in an ecumenical setting at University of Indiana, and we were looking for that type of environment. One day, my husband who was a professor at UCLA was walking down Bruin Walk and heard Mike Fink who happened to be the Wesley Foundation director at the time. What he was saying at the time was very provocative, and my husband agreed with it and asked where he was from. We went to Westwood UMC the very next Sunday, met three couples, and the rest was history. The congregation was active across all generations. In particular, the adult program including The Loft is current, and we're addressing the spiritual concerns people have about the world we're living in - the turmoil, the wars and coming to grips with that in modern times.



What is P.A.T.H., and why did you get involved?

Around 1982, several of the westside churches got together to be proactive in dealing with the homeless situation. They formed a non-profit called People Assisting the Homeless. They recently celebrated their 30th anniversary, and there are now several facilities in Los Angeles and other P.A.T.H. ventures in San Jose, San Diego, and Santa Barbara. It has grown enormously, and they are a model across the nation. I coordinate a breakfast on the last Saturday of the month, and we have dedicated youth and families who are active volunteers. We cook a hot breakfast for about 80 residents at P.A.T.H., and it's always a blessing. By 9 o'clock on Saturday morning, we have been thanked over and over and over again by 80 people.

KEITH PRICE | Serves as the leader of the Usher Team



How were you introduced to Westwood?

When I got a job at USC and moved out here in 1977, I picked Westwood out of the phone book, and the first Sunday I discovered the church started at the odd hour of 10:30am so I came back a week later.

What stands out as being unique about Westwood?

It's always been a wide range of ages. It's always been open and accepting, and there have always been people who have focused on greeting new people - whether they were officially assigned that job or that's just what they do.

How did you get involved in ushering, and why is it important?

Back then, when I was asked to be an usher, there were even-month and odd-month ushers with a total of 16 ushers. We deal with traffic flow helping people get in and out, and the number one question is, “Where are the rest rooms?”

What is it about ushering that you enjoy?

I guess a sense of control. (laughter) A worry of what would happen if I didn't do it, and I want things to run smoothly.



GROWING

“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.” Phil. 2:5-7 (NIV)

“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” Ephesians 4:22-24 (NIV)

DEANNA EDWARDS | Serves as Sunday School Superintendent

How did you come to Westwood UMC, and how would you describe it?

We moved from Indiana last June, because our three kids all live out here. We asked Tim and Katie Hooten (our daughter) about attending their church, and we started attending because of them. It's a friendly group of people. They are interested in outreach. When we started visiting, I noticed in the Worship Guide that there are a lot of opportunities to connect through service projects and even within the church. We came from a church that is similar. The Loft is a wonderful group of people worshipping in a non-traditional way with a great deal of conversation and dialogue. The traditional Sanctuary worship is mostly where we go, and that has a lot of meaning as well. There are a lot of fellowship opportunities for both groups, and you feel like you're all part of one big friendly group that have a purpose.



How have you gotten involved at the church?

I got involved, because Bo asked me to help with managing what happens on Sunday morning for the elementary children and choose what we will do. I have a background in early childhood education and elementary grades. I was very involved in my church in Indiana, and I was glad to have a way to give back here. It has been very meaningful to me.

What are some of the ways you're serving on a weekly basis?

We have three age levels, and I plan each week what they will do in their classrooms. I choose from our curriculum, because we have a limited amount of time. At about 15 minutes into the hour, we all get together, and we have a Bible story and then a response in each of the classrooms. When we're short on teachers, I go into the classroom to teach, which I really love. I have been involved in a ministry in the past in storytelling, and I've loved it. This gives me an opportunity to actually be with the children, and not just plan things and wonder what happened. I try to talk with the teachers afterward to hear how things went and see if anything needs to change. I hope to keep the children engaged in a meaningful activity so that we can see some faith development blossoming. I feel like I'm just beginning.

Why is serving in this way meaningful to you?

Passing along the faith is very meaningful to me. I was involved in a program called “Godly Play” by Jerome Berryman, and it focuses on the story. It helps the children reflect on it and respond with art or three-dimensional objects. The part that I loved is the wondering with the children and reflecting on the story. Asking, “What did you like about the story?” or “I wonder what the most important part of the story is.” Then, “Where are you in the story?” or “What part of the story is about you?” Those kinds of things make me feel like I've worshipped. If people say to me, “Oh, I'm sorry you had to miss worship today,” and I say, “Oh, no, I worshipped!” The kids are very transparent. They wonder about existential issues that everyone wonders about. That gives me a lot of meaning to feel like I'm making a difference in their faith development, and they're delightful. I think children are just delightful.

REG GIPSON | Serves as Follow-Up Teacher

Tell us how you came to Westwood UMC.

My wife, Penny, and I moved to Los Angeles a long time ago when I graduated from law school, and we were looking around for a church home. At law school, we had attended the Methodist church that was not far from the campus, so we tried a couple of other churches. When they didn't work out, we tried Westwood. On the first day we walked into the church, my wife turned to me and said, “I just love the feel of the sanctuary.” It's obviously a terrific sanctuary, and I very much enjoyed the community and leadership. So, we stayed.



What is Follow-Up, and what is its purpose?

Because Follow-Up is led by different presenters on different Sundays, there is actually a wide variety of Follow-Up offerings. The way I'm describing my offering is not the same as somebody else. A common denominator is that it's an opportunity for a discussion to extend and follow-up the worship service in a way that allows people to dialogue about serious issues that are rooted in the life of the faith community. What I try to emphasize in my presentations is the tremendous riches we have in the library we call the Bible and the ability of the church to dive back in those Scriptures and be informed by the parade of witnesses over literally hundreds of years with many different authors. It is a particular treasure that the church has. I really do try to spend the time in biblical study and getting people to understand that the Bible is worth some very serious time and attention. If you leave off your Bible study at the level of a fourth or fifth grader or even someone at junior high or high school, that is certainly is a benefit, but there is certainly a lot more that can be pursued as an adult. Much of the depiction of the Bible and the church in popular culture is just so far off the mark that it's good to have a place for people to go back to the source and see what the Bible actually does say.

What resources would you suggest as a Christian alternative to the conventional view of the world?

It is a great idea to get some expert guidance into the very strange world of the Bible. Among many, many, excellent books, two come immediately to mind: *Jesus Before Christianity* by Albert Nolan provides a careful, biblically grounded picture of the personality of Jesus and his approach to life based on the New Testament gospel records. Nolan allows the historical evidence about Jesus to systematically build up the picture of a very unconventional person who lived life at full tilt. We know from the Biblical record that Jesus was very familiar with the prophets of the Hebrew Bible and held up their words as guide and goal. Also, *The Prophetic Imagination* by Walter Brueggemann guides us to a new understanding of how God's community is very different than the community of the Pharaohs, both ancient and modern. According to the prophets, God's plan is that we live lives of freedom, of justice, and of compassion. I particularly like the way these two books together describe the prophetic tradition which Jesus lived out in action and adventure, and spoke about in aphorism and parable.

For me, I like some of the theologians who are helping us recover the movement aspect of Christianity as well as the institutional aspect. I know that importance of institutions, but Christianity as a movement. I want people to think about Christianity as action and adventure - God's action in the world and the adventure of us being part. It's a movement of people trying to find out where God is at work, and how do I get there and help God? In popular culture, Christianity is often caricatured as, “If you believe x, y, and z and do a, b, and c, then you're going to die and go to heaven.” That's backwards. That's like somebody going into a job and saying, “I'd like to really focus on the retirement benefits here. What are you guys doing for retirement?” Any HR person would show you the door. “No, we're not interested in your retiring. We have tons of work to do here. If you want to be part of our movement, our group, our company, these are the things that we want you to concentrate on.” This is not so much about how we get to heaven. Rather, how do we share heaven here?

When did you become part of the Westwood family?

I began attending Westwood United Methodist Church when I was in my senior year at UCLA. I was enthralled with Dr. Melvin Wheatley, the senior minister at the time, who gave incredible sermons challenging people to think about important social issues. This was far different than the fundamentalist Baptist church that I had attended off and on as a child. I found the congregation to be welcoming, and I joined the church in December 1964.

How would you describe Westwood in its current form?

Over the years, I've obviously seen quite a few changes particularly in terms of the focus. Initially, there was a strong academic orientation, not only in terms of Dr. Wheatley's sermons, but also in terms of programs and opportunities that were available to the congregation. Gradually, the focus has changed to a ministry of outreach and service to humanity. These are the kinds of programs that attracted me to Westwood Church. If I were talking to a visitor or prospective member, I would share my own experiences. Through the years, I have taught Sunday School classes to junior and senior high youth as well as through the Bethel Series. I co-taught the youth confirmation class for ten years and participated in the Stephen Ministry program as both a Stephen minister and leader. I've served as a member and chairman of the Youth Council and secretary to the church's Administrative Council. Currently, I'm on the Staff Parish Relations Committee and involved in the Mission Team. Being interested in outreach projects, I participated in seven week-long mission trips to Louisiana and Mississippi following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. In talking with prospective members, I would share information about the variety of opportunities including the Follow-Up class and Loft services, which offer an alternative to the traditional service in the sanctuary.



Tell us a bit about the history of The Spire and how it has changed over the years.

In the late 1980's, there was an opportunity to apply for the position of Spire Editor, and I had always been interested in journalism starting junior high school where I was the assistant editor of our monthly school newspaper. Continuing in high school, I was selected as the editor of our weekly school newspaper. Early in my teaching career, I was asked to teach journalism, which I did for 12 years prior to becoming an administrator. As a school administrator, I realized that something was missing, and editing the weekly church newsletter, *The Spire*, filled that gap. So, after school each Tuesday afternoon, I would drive to church and spend between three and four hours compiling the newsletter, which looked far different than what it did a few years later. I can't believe how much it has changed.

At one point, the decision was made to change *The Spire* from weekly to bi-monthly, and I remained the editor. Many happy memories of those days remain with me, especially the opportunity to interact with many church members in a variety of ways. I'm very thankful for that experience as well as to write for the current *Spire* magazine.

As you think about the next five or ten years, what are your hopes and dreams for Westwood?

I find that to be a challenge. I wonder what the world will be like in 2021 or 2026. I certainly hope that our church membership will continue to grow in numbers as I believe the mission and vision of our church is a very significant one. I hope that the emphasis on outreach, not only to our members but to people who we may never meet in lands faraway, will continue. I look forward to a time when those who attend *The Sanctuary* and *The Loft* can experience more interaction. It's always good to dream, especially when these dreams can become a reality.

LEADING

"Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all." Mark 9:35 (NIV)

"Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone." Col. 4:5-6 (NIV)

"Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood." Acts 20:28 (ESV)

How did Westwood become your church family?

I moved to LA about four years ago. I moved all by myself, and I had no idea where I was going. I had an apartment about two blocks away just out of luck. I didn't know what Westwood was. I didn't know what this area was. I just got really lucky. After being in this area for about four or five months by myself, I started missing having a connection with God - one where you take time out of your day to go to church and connect with people who share your religion. So, I started a quest to go to every single church in this neighborhood. I went to so many churches for so long, and once I came to Westwood United Methodist, I stopped looking. The first time I came here I knew this is where I needed to be. I started going to *The Sanctuary*, and I would go every Sunday. It was such a beautiful and positive message the pastor always had to give. That got me through much. I've moved to two different apartments, and I still come here every Sunday. This is my family. I live in Playa del Rey now, and I drive about 30 minutes to come. I don't mind at all. I don't see myself going to another church. This is my family. This is my home.



How do you describe Westwood to your friends?

I love bringing my friends especially if they're visiting from elsewhere. I always tell them, "You have to come to my church. It's such a beautiful, positive place." We go to *The Loft*, and I tell that it's a different way of doing church. We sit in a living room where it feels like you're sitting with your family. We not only listen to what the pastor has to say, but we also converse and exchange ideas. We process what we learn, and for me, it makes it a lot easier to learn and understand. I also tell them that *The Sanctuary* is beautiful and that Pastor John is amazing. I love the music program that we have for both services. That is what I tell them.

How did you get involved in organizing volunteers in The Loft, and what does that entail?

When I started volunteering for *The Loft*, I was really broke, and I didn't have any money. Even though we don't pressure to donate to the church, I still wanted to contribute, but I couldn't contribute financially. So, I started volunteering. I started making coffee for *The Loft*. I started helping out at every single event we have at the church. Once I got more involved, Chris moved me from the Hospitality team to the Connections team where you are more in touch with people. Then, Chris asked me if I wanted to manage the Connections team, so now I organize every single volunteer we have. I think it's a great way of getting involved. I know when I was asked to read Scripture for the first time, it made me feel special. "Oh they know me. They know my name, and they trust me with the microphone." That's how I got involved.

Why would you encourage others to get involved at Westwood?

Because it is our home, and it is our family. That's what we do. We take care of our home, and we take care of our family. It's a great way to be involved. Of course, coming here and listening and talking to people is good, but it's also such a rewarding experience to know that you physically contributed.

How did you and your family come to Westwood UMC?

We started coming to Westwood United Methodist Church about 10 years ago. My husband, Elliott, and I have two kids - a 14 year old, Maxwell, and a 10 year old, Laurel. After Laurel was born, we started looking for a church home. My husband was raised Presbyterian, and I didn't attend church growing up. I was a Christian, but I didn't have a church denomination to which I belonged. We started looking around for a church home, and we actually came to the Methodist Church by way of my social justice background. I am an attorney, and I've worked with social justice organizations. I wanted to make sure that whatever church I went to did not have policies that conflicted with my civil liberties background. The United Methodist Church, particularly in the Los Angeles area, was a really good fit. We started visiting churches, and my son actually said, "I don't want to go to another church. I like this church. Let's stop visiting." So, we stopped visiting. Then, when my daughter was two, we both were baptized together - about eight years ago now.



How would you describe Westwood UMC?

It's a very warm and welcoming community. We attend The Sanctuary service, and the sanctuary is so inspirational and moving. John and the pastoral staff at Westwood - the way they create our faith experience is very encouraging. You're not told to believe a certain thing, and you're not told that you have to worship in a certain way. You're guided in your faith experience. For someone that didn't grow up in the church, that was really important. I didn't want to go to a church that was going to tell me, "You can't do this" and "You should do that." I wanted a church that would help me understand what my calling was.

As its Chair, can you explain the role of the Staff Parish Relations Committee?

The Staff Parish Relations Committee is responsible for being the liaison between the congregation and the staff of the church. That is one of their responsibilities. When congregants have issues or concerns, they bring them to the SPRC, but also we are like the Human Resources committee for the church. We are the advocates for the pastoral staff and the administrative staff. We evaluate the pastors and submit those to the Conference, and then we do internal evaluations for the remainder of our staff. We work in conjunction with the Trustees and the Stewardship Committee. I think I came to it, because of my work. Our church is very democratic - similar to the way our government works. You nominate people and elect them to positions, and it's very methodical. Because of the work I do outside of church - supporting candidates who are running for office and other government commissions and boards - I think this was a good fit for me as an advocacy and governance role.

What do you enjoy about being part of the committee?

Getting to know everyone. I meet with all the staff and pastors, and I get to know them personally and as my faith leaders. I also get to interface with our Cal-Pac Conference. As the Chair, I am one of the delegates for our annual conference, and that allows me to attend and vote on different resolutions and rules that come up and affect the life of our church. We have a very engaged, thoughtful, and intellectual community at Westwood, and that requires me to be very diligent in getting to know what the feelings and goals of our church community so that I can best represent them to our annual conference, which is an interesting experience all by itself. You get to meet Methodists all over the western region, and it can be a little interesting. Living in Los Angeles, you're in a little bit of a bubble. While it's diverse ethnically, culturally, and socio-economically, there are things that aren't present, and you are reminded that although we are all on a similar United Methodist journey, the paths that we take don't always look the same. It challenges you to remain open-minded, respectful, and committed.

How long have you been part of The Loft?

I started going to The Loft at the end of 2013, a few months after I moved to the LA area, and I've been there ever since. Even though I live in Pasadena and it felt like I was traveling forever the first time, I knew it was where I wanted to be. From then on, it's never felt like a chore to drive over. It's something I look forward to every Sunday morning.

Tell me about your participation in The Loft.

When I left Iowa, I had spent six years at a church in various roles, but never really diving in. I think that was an incorrect approach that I see now. There is so much that I could have done if I would have jumped in from the beginning. When I found The Loft, this is the place that feels like home, and I want to be involved in whatever way I can. Bo and Chris asked me if I wanted to be a little more involved in leadership. We saw a need for more people to get involved, so I started recruiting people to pray or read a Scripture on Sunday. That became a de facto thing I did on Sundays. When we rolled out small group, I helped think about how we wanted to do that. We also figured out that a connection aspect was needed. So, I worked to build out those structures and train those teams. I wrote out all the instructions, made a checklist, and trained the teams. Whenever something felt like it was needed, I offered up my time to do that. That's something I can do confidently. Work with people, rally people, and so I might as well do that for The Loft.



What does it mean for you to be a leader in The Loft?

One of the things that I love about The Loft is that it's a community where if you try a little bit you can get to know everybody. To get involved at the leadership level, it puts me in front of new people. It puts me in front of people who are coming back to the church, and it makes me feel integrated. It's a little harder now, but at one point on a Sunday, I could name everyone in the space. Even though I can't have a conversation with all 60 people on a given Sunday, I know everyone who's here, and that's made possible through the work I've been doing as a leader.

How would you say you've grown as a leader since you've been participating in The Loft?

Because it's this space where we don't have to believe the same thing or practice our faith in the same way, it's opened up how I understand our call to be a community and our call to be people of God - to be broader than simply the one organization you're part of on a Sunday morning. That openness that runs through the entirety of The Loft and really Westwood United Methodist Church has grown how understand and interact with everyone else. I've also been fortunate to go to small groups and have how I understand things be challenged by the people sitting next to me in a way that hasn't happened to me in other places.

Why would you encourage people to get involved at Westwood if they haven't already?

Putting some action behind the words you say on a Sunday morning is important. More than anything, there is a lot of value in the community beyond just being there on Sunday - getting involved in ministry or a service project we have on campus. I don't know a lot of the people in The Sanctuary, but I've gotten to know them more when we do more things together. In the same way, we can have deep personal conversations about nuanced things at The Loft, but you've exchanged your name once at the beginning. Your name and who you are gets overshadowed by the content of what we're talking about. I've had people tell me, "I know very personal things about a lot of people, but I keep forgetting their name." To get involved is to be more connected at that name basis. It takes the two - intentional conversation and interaction on a team.

Westwood United Methodist Church
10497 Wilshire Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90024

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