

“Now and Ever”
The Annual and Capital Campaigns
of Westminster

A dialogue presented at Services, Oct 27, 2019
by Michele Mahaffey – lead co-chair of Annual Campaign 2020
and Robert Constantine – member of Capital Campaign cabinet

Both: Good morning!

Robert: Thank you, Michele, for being the lead co-chair of our annual generosity campaign. I’m glad to be on the Capital Campaign cabinet, but if we don’t make our annual goal, the necessary work to repair the building and campus is a moot point.

Michele: Thanks Robert, and thank you to my co-chair, Cameron Airhart. You know, I chose to lead this campaign and serve our church because I am so grateful for Westminster, for the spiritual grounding that it gives to me, and my family...It’s hard for me to believe that we’ve been coming here for 16 years, joining as members just before we were married 15 years ago. We were blessed to have our children attend the very best childcare and preschool we have in the city, right here at Westminster. We are grateful that we can come and fill our hearts and minds with lessons and music, and the spiritual guidance that comes with being here at Westminster.

We know, Robert, that the pledges, contributions and gifts to the annual campaign help us do all of that here at Westminster, and so much more.

For the Giving 2020 campaign, we are keeping the goal the same as last year, but hoping for a modest increase. As we all know, costs are rising, and our draw from the church’s invested funds - that are the backstop for a rainy day- is getting larger. We simply need all of us to step up.

Robert: I agree. Plus, we have welcomed new staff members - the Reverends Katelyn and Micah Nutter-Dowling - who are here to help us grow our Sunday School and youth programs. It’s hard to think of a more important reason to give to this church, in fact, to increase our giving - in this complicated and dangerous world- than the care, education, and preparation for life of our children and young people.

Michele: with two children who attend Sunday school, I would certainly agree to that-- And I would add- the new heights that Garrett Martin and our music program reaches each year. Robert, have you seen the Westminster Presents catalogue for 2019-2020? And I’ll never forget last Lent when we filled Parish Hall for four Wednesdays in a row with members of Jewish, Muslim and Christian congregations talking about the similarities and differences between our faith traditions. And did you hear the announcement this morning that we’ll be co-sponsoring the prayer vigil this afternoon with the Muslim Public Affairs Council to pray for peace in the world from Syria to Kashmir where new fighting has broken out? It’s that community building that makes this such a special place.

Robert: Indeed. Westminster is a special place. I can think of no church that combines excellent worship * with social justice * with mission for children and youth* and which stands as a leader in the larger community – the way this church does. It is the reason that Janie and I came to Westminster nearly 40 years ago. Our children enrolled at WECP, as yours have, and with the intellectually and spiritually challenging messages from the pulpit over the years, we became more involved in church activities and mission. I even sat up in the choir loft for 13 years!

Michele: You know, for Brendan and me our giving to Westminster is at the top of our priorities. We are asked to give to a lot of organizations – most of them have other means of funding in addition to annual giving. But what we have here depends solely upon members' gifts and generosity. Giving to Westminster requires more than a sharpened pencil and calculator. It takes giving from the heart – Brendan and I ask ourselves after we've arrived at a gift if it's stretching us and if we are satisfied with it. Do we feel good about the gift in response to all the we receive from this church – its members and programs and role in our city?

Robert: I liken the Annual Generosity campaign to running our household. Each year, I know that I will have recurring, ongoing expenses for utilities, insurance, snow removal, repairs and maintenance. I budget for those costs and for personal, family activities as well. I pay those expenses out of our checkbook on a monthly basis; and, for a number of years before my retirement, I paid my stewardship pledge to Westminster in small increments, each time I received a paycheck. Each month, I took care of both my house and of God's house.

Michele: But we are here to discuss both the Annual Generosity Campaign and the "Preserve the Pinnacle" Capital Campaign - 2 campaigns for "Now and Ever." As a member of our Capital Campaign Cabinet, would you tell us about the needs that lead us to a capital campaign?

Robert: Sure, Michele. In addition to meeting the current, recurrent, annual needs that further the mission of the Church – the "Now" part - we want to make sure that the legacy of Westminster is here for future generations - the "Ever" part. That's why we are embarking on a significant capital campaign. The Westminster family has an exemplary history of generous support when our building or our music program or when a critical mission of the church is at risk; or, when we are called to extend our mission to another part of our community, as we did nearly 20 years ago on Buffalo's West side, with the WEDI program. Once this congregation informs itself of the elements of a capital campaign, I believe we become spiritually vested and we always respond. Prior generations have delivered this church and its mission into our hands.

In this campaign we are asking people to make a significant gift to literally preserve our pinnacle and to keep this physical campus safe and stable; to preserve our landmark pipe organs that are reaching the end of their serviceable lives unless major repairs are made; to put a roof on this place that will keep the damaging water away from our ceiling and from prevent it from undermining our walls; to repair and protect these beautiful, heritage stained glass windows; to restore our main front doors before they can no longer be restored; and to launch a significant new field of mission on the East

Side, collaboratively with other area not-for-profits. When you ask people to give to that, they tend to catch the spirit of what we are trying to achieve.

We have set an ambitious goal of \$4.1 million to address these needs. And, I am pleased to announce that, as of today, we have received commitments of \$2.5 million! We are most grateful to those who have already stepped forward and we give them our sincere thanks.

Michele: That is very exciting, Robert. Will these 2 campaigns be running simultaneously?

Robert: Well, we certainly are kicking them off simultaneously! But, whereas the annual campaign generally closes by the end of January, we expect the capital campaign to extend to June. Because more people than not have the ability to consider such giving and because our goal is ambitious, we are giving ourselves more time to raise these dollars.

Michele: How will we speak with donors about the 2 campaigns?

Robert: Going back to my personal household analogy - I generally pay for my regular household expenses from my income, out of my checkbook. But, if I had a roof to replace and unavoidable, major repairs to make, or other major initiatives, I would look to "non-checkbook assets" to pay for those. For those of us who have had a chance to build some financial assets in an investment account, or in a retirement plan, I suggest that we look at these assets as sources for giving. For people who have investments, the stock market has had 10 years of unprecedented growth. I will ask people: "Look at the stocks that you own. Are there any that you would sell tomorrow if you didn't have to pay tax on the gain? If so, use some of *that* stock to make your gift to this campaign. Avoid the tax and get a deduction." As with most campaigns of this sort, we expect that most folks will spread their gifts over the next 3 years.

I might ask people to look at the value of their accounts over the last 3 years. Will they commit some of that growth to the preservation and future of this church? Isn't our personal prosperity a blessing to be shared?

We want to get around to meet individually with people and answer their questions about the needs this campaign is addressing; we want to talk about methods of giving over a three year period and we want probably as much as anything to tell and listen to their Westminster stories...what brings us here; why we keep coming back.... Yes. There are two campaigns Michele, but it's really one cause - this great church and the community we serve... I'm confident we can reach - and exceed - our respective goals because of the heart of this congregation. I believe that we will follow the example given to us by the generations who came before us. I believe we will pass along a stronger and more secure Westminster, and community, as a legacy to the generations who will follow us.

Michele: I agree Robert. It's the people here that I look forward to seeing every Sunday. The friends of all ages. The common cause we share and the common faith we have.

We look forward to meeting with you over the next 3 Sundays after service. We're inviting everyone to come to the library where you can pick up your pledge cards and learn much more about these 2 campaigns, get all of your questions answered, so you can learn how you can join us in this important time of growth for Westminster.

Robert: I ask that when one of us or our volunteers call you, please accept the call; if we ask for a visit, please accept the visit. Share with us your Westminster story; ask questions so you fully understand the vision and needs of the Church as addressed in each of the campaigns. Then, thoughtfully, and generously, make your commitment to Westminster.

Both: Thank you.