

Westminster Presbyterian

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Westminster Presbyterian also Connects to:

- Immanuel Presbyterian Church
- Epikos
- Shorewood Presbyterian/ North Shore Presbyterian
- Northminster Presbyterian Church
- Park Place Methodist/ Kenwood Methodist Church
- Plymouth Church
- St. Mark's Episcopal Church
- Congregation El B'ne Jeshurun

Historical Overview

Westminster Presbyterian Church began as a Mission Chapel outreach of Immanuel Presbyterian Church located at the corner of E. Kane Place and Cambridge Avenue. Established in 1877, the Mission moved once to a new building at the corner of Thomas St. and North Frederick Ave. before it incorporated into a church. In 1895, the final church building was built on East Bellview Place. Built of red brick in a neo-gothic style the church was renovated several times during its history, the most drastic of these remodels occurred in 1940 when the organ was moved from the back to the right side of the sanctuary and partially walled-in, opening up space to install the rose stained-glass window present today.

Over the years, the church founded two missions that went on to incorporate into their own churches: Northminster Presbyterian in 1909 and North Shore Presbyterian in 1922. The church also supported itself and local and foreign missions through volunteer work and fundraising. Some of its fundraising endeavors included a yearly Strawberry festival, Maple Syrup socials, church bazaars and white elephant gift auctions. The Women's Auxiliary organized the same year the church was founded was responsible for many of these fundraising efforts. Pews were assigned since the beginning of the church, but later converted to a system of voluntary pew rentals, which was likewise abolished sometime in the 20th century. The church elected its first female elders in 1961 and bought its first computer in 1986.

Sunday School was a very important aspect of Westminster's service, with special second floor rooms dedicated to it from 1907 onwards. Social groups and clubs for people of all ages and walks of life were also integral to the church's life. The Young Married Couples Club formed in 1926, enticed members with desserts, games, and especially shuffleboard. The shuffleboard court tiled into the basement floor remains visible today. Other groups included Men's and Women's Bible study groups, and Aquatic Boy's Club, and even a Boy's Boxing Club that was quickly disbanded when the governing Session was unwilling to allow them to meet on church property.

Westminster also had a history of cooperation with other churches, including holding joint-worship services and sharing space with Kenwood Methodist, Plymouth, and St. Mark's Episcopal

Church. On the occasion of their 75th Anniversary letters of congratulations were sent from the Episcopal Bishop of Milwaukee, the Catholic Archbishop of Milwaukee, the Director of the Greater Milwaukee Council of Churches, and Rabbi Dudley Weinburg of Congregation El B'ne Jeshurun as well as former pastors Rev. Lee Jennings Ferry and Rev. Dr. George Wallace Robertson.

Westminster carefully observed its anniversaries, planning special events for 1915, 1940, 1965, and 1990. In 2005, Westminster began renting their building part-time to Epikos. In 2009, after years of declining membership, Westminster Presbyterian Church was dissolved by the Presbytery of Milwaukee and the building sold to Epikos permanently. The church had been in decline since the early 1960s when Reverend Carl R. Simon alienated some members of the congregation with his political views. The neighborhood had also undergone demographic change beginning in the mid 20th century, as older members died off and younger members married, had children, and moved to the suburbs, the congregation shrank. The lack of parking space also impacted members of the congregation who wished to drive. When the church was dissolved in 2009, there were only ten members remaining.

Timeline

- 1877- November 12. Immanuel Mission Chapel was established at the corner of E. Kane Place and Cambridge Avenue, costing \$1,200 dollars.
- 1890- The mission moved to the corner of Thomas Street and N. Frederick Avenue.
- 1890- June 25. The Women's Auxiliary organized "to aid in social and other domestic work of the church and in Home and Foreign Missions."
- 1890- March 18. Westminster Presbyterian organized as its own church with 20 charter members.
- 1892- June. The first Strawberry Festival was held by the young people of the church.
- 1890-1893- St. St. Mark's Mission (later St. Mark's Episcopal Church) leased Westminster for church use at \$20 a month. Despite a need for extra revenue, the lease was terminated within a year due to the annoyance of St. Mark's "boys".
- 1895- May 1. Plans for a new building were adopted.
- 1895- November 24. The building on East Belleview Place was dedicated.
- 1899- October 1. A mission was organized at Chamber and Wells Streets.
- 1906- February 8. The pipe organ, costing \$3,500, was dedicated.
- 1907- October 6. Sunday school room dedicated.
- 1907- Unfinished chapel completed.
- 1909- The Chamber and Wells Streets Mission was established as Northminster Presbyterian Church with 15 charter members from Westminster.
- 1911- Combined summer evening services with Plymouth Church began.
- 1914- The Aquatic Boys Club founded.
- 1914- December 14. Two of four Sunday School boys accused of stealing communion grape juice from the kitchen, Elmer and Herbert, were called before the Session. Elmer denied the theft, but Herbert broke down and confessed. "After considerable discussion regarding the conduct of these boys and the young people in general it was thought best that the entire matter be left to the pastor to settle as he saw fit".
- 1915- March 18. 25th Anniversary is observed.
- 1915- The first remodel occurred. Additions were made to the east side of the chapel.

- 1915- Church membership reached 535 people.
- 1921- October 9. Shorewood Mission was opened at Stowell and Atwater (now Capitol Drive).
- 1922- June. Shorewood Mission organized into Shorewood Presbyterian (now North Shore Presbyterian) with 17 charter members from Westminster.
- 1922- April 16. A \$15 Easter offering by the Ku Klux Klan was refused by the Westminster Session as their activities were “not in harmony with the principles of the church”.
- 1926- August. Westminster Club began under the name the Young Married Couples Club.
- 1930- June. Joint evening services with Park Place Methodist (Kenwood) began.
- 1938- Second remodel began. Roof was repaired.
- 1940- March 18. 50th Anniversary was observed, a vote was taken on the sanctuary and organ remodel.
- 1940- October 16. Remodel was completed, particularly the sanctuary. The organ was moved to the right side of the sanctuary and the walls were sealed.
- 1950- The second-floor Sunday school rooms were remodeled.
- 1952- June 20. Westminster’s morning worship was broadcast over WTMJ-TV.
- 1960s- Strawberry Festival occurred on the 2nd Saturday of June. Bendfelt vanilla ice cream, homemade cakes, and homemade strawberry sauce were served along with coffee and lemonade. Recorded Strauss waltzes played in the background.
- 1961- December 5. The first women elders, Helen James and Myrine Cleary, were elected.
- 1965- August 26. 75th Anniversary was observed. Letters of congratulations were sent from the Episcopal Bishop of Milwaukee, the Catholic Archbishop of Milwaukee, the Director of the Greater Milwaukee Council of Churches, and Rabbi Dudley Weinburg of Congregation El B’ne Jeshurun.
- 1965- October 21-24. Production of T.S. Eliot’s *Murder in the Cathedral* with ecumenical cast of Milwaukeeans was presented.
- 1981- March 21- May 23. Kitchen/Fellowship Hall remodel was accomplished by 31 volunteers, about one-fourth of the congregation.
- 1986- The church bought its first computer.
- 1989- Centennial Celebration was observed. Martha Brown the church organist performed the John Haynes Holmes hymn “O God, Whose Love Is Over All” with a new tune she had written to commemorate the 100th anniversary.
- 1990s- On two separate occasions, Westminster held clown-themed worship services.
- 2005- Epikos Church began renting the building for church use.
- 2009- April 2. Westminster Presbyterian Church was dissolved by the Presbytery of Milwaukee.
- 2009- East Bellevue Place building was sold to Epikos.

Annotated Bibliography

Reverend Alan McAlister’s personal papers from Westminster Presbyterian Church, 75th Anniversary Observance Pamphlets and Centennial Souvenir Folder, Milwaukee, Accessed 2018.

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