

Ministry Minute

Coffee, Conversation, and Connections

“Westwood Puts a Kick in a Cup of Morning Joe”



Westwood took the morning coffee klatch to a new level this year with its Coffee, Conversations, and Connections group. It was so successful that the group will take it up a notch when programming resumes in the fall.

Pastor Tania Haber gives credit for the kicked-up coffee break to Westwood member Penne Sewall.

The first two months of this summer were an experiment to gauge interest, so session topics were left open to those who showed up. But the Thursday morning gatherings quickly evolved from simple socializing to conversations about life, retirement, grandchild care, travel, health, and more. Participants shaped the agenda.



Penne Sewall

“The group tends to skew older because it meets during the day,” Penne said. But within the group, there is a diversity in where people are on their faith and life journeys.

Some are newly retired or thinking about retirement, while others have been retired for a couple of decades. Their interests are similar, but their stage in life is different.

Initially, about 60 showed up for coffee. Over the season, attendance shifted weekly, and an average of 20-25 people showed up each time to share a beverage and a bit of chatter.

John Stark attended almost every session. He’s been doing the hard work of making health care, financial and personal adjustments as he adapts to retirement. And he’s begun searching for his next chapter.

He joined because he was interested in Pastor Tania’s Third Chapter ministry and wanted to meet people. “I thought it would be a good friendship thing,” he said, “...and there were treats!”

The sessions have provided valuable insights on retirement and other topics.

“Everybody is in different situations. They’re telling you to do bucket list things while you still can. People’s travels were a really good conversation,” he said. “Someone had just come back from a trip and talked about how they arranged it. Another week, we did a computer scam thing, and that was really good. We’re making it up as we go along,” he said. “We like being around each other.”



John Stark

That suits Pastor Tania and Penne Sewall.

“One component of the Third Chapter is ‘What’s my life going to look like?’” said Pastor Tania. Westwood’s vision statement includes a mission to “create connections so we can know each other and feel like we belong.” “This just nails that one,” she said.

Penne likes the group’s recognition of a shift in priorities. “There is a change of paradigm in what it means to age. This is a productive time of life and a place where we can make a difference,” she said. “We can take some of our life experiences and wisdom we’ve gained from the challenges and good times of our lives and share them with others.”

She also sees an advantage to a Westwood-based group that learns from each other. “We have the luxury of bringing the faith perspective to this. It makes such a difference that God’s presence is in our life as we go through life,” she said.

The group brainstormed ideas and topics for the next round of sessions, which starts the first Thursday in September. Instead of weekly meetings, they will meet twice a month, and sessions will include guest presenters, panel discussions, research literature, videos, and TED talks.

Sara Moran, Director of Congregational Care, and Pastor Tania will be the group’s Westwood staff liaisons in the future.