

# CELEBRATION OF LIFE



**Judith Jean (Westendorf) Westlee**  
**April 25, 1941 - March 13, 2025**

Judith (Judy) Jean Westlee died on March 13, 2025, as her niece was singing "The Old Rugged Cross", a favorite hymn of Judy. She died peacefully.

Judy was born to Fred and Leona (Dean) Westendorf on April 25, 1941. Judy was the youngest of five growing up on the family farm. The animals on the farm were her companions. She loved the chickens, ducks, dogs, cats and specifically Ole May, a mule. Judy was quick to say she was raised by a mule.

Judy started school in a one room schoolhouse. All of her siblings were schooled by Mrs. Davison. They dearly loved her. Judy went to the Rochester High School and then she attended University of MN studying journalism. A friend encouraged Judy to get a job in New York city. They worked for Wards for a short time. Judy worked for a newspaper and was given a column for "the women interest". She worked in the WPIX building.

She continued to work in journalism and public relations (PR) when she moved back to MN at the Hopkins local newspaper. There was a particular story that resonated with her, and it changed her career. The PR site was the "MN Mental Retardation", an archaic and cruel label. This work was deeply meaningful to Judy. She and two other people established MN Special Olympics in 1973. In fact, Judy was involved very early in the Olympics with Eunice Kennedy who was a devoted advocate for disability rights. They traveled across the United States to support and assist, starting other different abled athletic competitions.

By mid-life Judy felt the call to ministry. She graduated from Candler School of Theology in Atlanta with a M.Div in 1982. She served as pastor to the following United Methodist churches:

McGregor, Fleming, Palisade, South Haven, Kimball, Mpls: Walker and St Paul: Central Park. She retired in 2003. Her German Shepherd, Sarai was her constant companion. She was a pastor and advocate for all. Judy was a deeply caring pastor and activist, full of hope and determination as she led and worked with others for justice for lesbian and gay people from the 1980s onward, in conversation with the Conference and Bishop, as a leader and newsletter editor of National Affirmation, and in the local and national Reconciling Church movement. It was a joy that Judy was able to see and acknowledge the changes in the United Methodist denomination before her death.

Judy called herself "The Ugly Duckling" because she felt quite alone for most of her life, until she met Janet Lee. Falling in love with Janet released the ugly duckling and Judy became a beautiful swan. Judy and Janet had a Holy Union on June 18, 1994, each changing their last name to Westlee. The fairy tale had come true. Judy and Janet were partners that loved deeply. When MN legalized same sex marriages, Judy and Janet were one of the first on September 14, 2013.

Janet's death in 2024 was very difficult for Judy. She was anxious to be together in heaven with Janet. Amen.

Judy was preceded in death by her loving wife, Janet, her parents, her siblings, Virginia Fincher, Leon Westendorf and David Westendorf.

Judy is survived by her sister, Helen Anderson, 10 nieces and nephews, long-time friend Bernie Schmidt and many friends and colleagues.

A celebration of Life will be held on March 27, 2025 at Prospect Park, UMC, located on 22 SE Orlin Ave., Minneapolis. Pastor Paul Baudhuin will be officiating. Visitation at 10 am, 11 am service. We welcome all to a meal after the service. A private graveside service will be at Lakewood Cemetery.

