

*Now therefore revere the Lord, and serve him with sincerity and in faithfulness. . .choose this day whom you will serve. . .as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.* Joshua 24:14-15

This fall the adult Sunday morning class initiated a new format. Pat Bacon began with a study of Matthew, followed by Rick Lorentz's discussion of the movie, "I Am." Currently, Cynthia Mahoney is teaching us the roots of the Christmas symbols and their meaning. The new year brings Jim Christensen introducing Buddhist practices that enhance Christian faith formation, a Marcus Borg study by Pat, and a series about Paul led by Rick. I'm grateful for the wide variety and for everyone's willingness to try something new. If you haven't attended yet, please do. This church has wonderful adult leaders on Sundays and with weekly small groups.

We also have a strong core of teachers for the youth and younger children. We continue to enjoy the Gather 'Round curriculum, which is story-based. For example, the children and youth learned about different prophets for ten weeks in the fall. From Epiphany through Easter we focused on Jesus as told in Mark's Gospel. This helps us create a solid foundation for understanding Biblical teachings. The thematic repetition also helps young people become more comfortable with Biblical concepts and language.

Gene and I taught confirmation, which is one of my favorite FFM responsibilities. David, Meghan B., Meghan D., and Ryan made each session a joy. This year we divided our time between conversations at Faith and field trips that helped us understand our faith. We went to Anshe Chesed Temple, Lakeview Cemetery, the Art Museum, the UCC Church House, and St. Paul's Congregational Church. During conversations we talked about the Bible, faith practices, spiritual gifts, worship, mission, stewardship, and our personal faith.

When youth meet we focus on how the words and actions of Biblical figures can guide our everyday choices. We talk about Jesus caring for others and we rake leaves or create blankets. We learn about Christian responses to suicide and participate in the SPEA (Suicide Prevention Education Alliance) awareness walk. We read the Beatitudes and envision how to make Jesus' words a reality in daily life. We've chatted about the war in Syria, dating violence, bullying, and human rights. And, we went rock climbing, hiking, watched movies, supported each other by attending school sporting or arts events, and just enjoyed each other's company.

One of our challenges is that our young people are currently in ten different school systems. Many of our families are the only Faith family in a school system, elementary through high school. This means our young people and their families see Faith folks only when they are at Faith. They don't see each other at school, soccer, music lessons, daycare or the grocery store, library, or gas station. There's not a natural ebb and flow of Faith community. We have a stop and start flow. If we want a thriving Faith community, then we need to be intentional about our priorities and actions. On a positive note, if we can introduce Faith and gain two or three additional families per school system, that would add twenty to thirty families to Faith. This momentum is needed on many levels. It would also help create familiar caring communities and help reduce some of our isolation, Monday through Saturday.

One of FFM's ministries started as a Sunday preschool activity. Now, various classes and the congregation send greeting cards to college students and members we don't see frequently. Our college students thank enthusiastically. Our members in assisted living or nursing homes enjoy mail and seasonal pictures. Mrs. Olhava told me, "I love getting those cards. When I see them, I remember where I belong." Six times a year, FFM organizes and sends cards so these two groups remember that we love them. This is not expensive or difficult and it keeps us in each other's thoughts and prayers.

None of this would be possible without the amazing FFM team: Nancy Jacquet (chair), Leslie Huston, Sharon Jakse, Barb Holtz, and Earl Graham. Special thanks to each of them.

In all FFM does we strive to encourage, model, learn, and support each other and those we encounter so they, too, will choose to serve the Lord with sincerity and in faithfulness.

Blessings, Karen Wagner

