

# Focus on Formation at RPPC

By Heather Russell

## Relational Spiritual Formation

On Kick-off Sunday, we unveiled a new approach to our educational ministry here at RPPC. We're going to be moving forward with a relational model of Spiritual formation. In case you missed the sermon that day, here's a synopsis of the information that was shared.

### What is Spiritual Formation?

According to the Office of Spiritual Formation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), "Spiritual formation is the activity of the Holy Spirit which molds our lives into the likeness of Jesus Christ... We cooperate with this work of the Spirit through certain practices that make us more open and responsive to the Spirit's touch, disciplines such as sabbath keeping, works of compassion and justice, discernment, worship, hospitality, spiritual friendships, and contemplative silence."

### How does Relational fit in?

As we learn in I Corinthians 12, we are the body of Christ- all of us, from cradle to grave. From birth to death, we are called to be in relationship with one another, and with God. You could say God is all about relationship- God, the Three in One, is a relational entity by definition. We are called to support each other, learn from each other, and walk with each other through this life. So, it follows naturally that the best way to learn about God would be together, in relationship with our neighbor, and with God.

We have two main places where we grow in these relationships: Worship and Learning Time. In the past, we've had a 'Sunday School', which happened during worship time. Our school aged children and their teachers left the service in order to hear a bible story and do a related activity. At the end of the worship service, families would reunite for fellowship time.

One particularly difficult thing about this model was that it was sending a message, however unintentionally, to our children: worship is for the grown-ups, and is not for you. There are several things troubling about this message, not the least of which is that as those children grew, they formed little or no sense of their place in the worshipping body, and stopped coming. We began to discern what steps we could take to help these kids understand and connect to the service as vital members of the body of Christ. The new model is the arrangement we've decided to try.

### What does the new model look like?

Beginning this past Sunday, kids in the K-2<sup>nd</sup> Grade age group will be leaving worship after the Time For All God's Children to attend a new group called Bridge to Worship. During this time, they will have an age-appropriate worship experience. They'll be studying the same scripture lesson as the rest of the congregation, and hearing the same message from the sermon, but at a level they can grasp easily. They

will also be learning about the parts of worship, how these parts connect, and how they can find meaning within them. For example, this past Sunday was focused on forgiveness in community. We spent some time talking about the prayer of confession, and how we really are saying we're sorry to God for the things we've done, and why it's important enough to do it each and every week, and all together. We then found all the words having to do with forgiveness in the prayer, and in the hymn after the sermon.

Making the Bridge to Worship change meant doing away with the Sunday school time for the older children. These children are invited to remain in worship, and to attend our new learning time, intended for all ages together. It's called Common Time, and it happens after Fellowship time in the Assembly Hall from 11:30-12:15. During this time, we'll be learning together, sharing our stories and gifts, deepening our understanding of the Bible, and helping to fulfill the promises we make at each child's baptism- to support and guide them in their faith formation paths. Sometimes, we'll be reading and studying scripture. Other times, we may have contemplative prayer stations. We may work on a group project together, such as assembling care packages for our college students, or planning creative worship stations for upcoming services. Whatever we do, we will be learning from each other.

We understand that with change comes uncertainty, and possibly apprehension. We are here to help! At our upcoming ParentCare meeting, we will spend some time talking about how to best resource and support each other in worship, especially for the older kids who may be struggling with remaining in the service. Mark and I are always happy to meet with you individually to answer any questions, or for you to share ideas you may have. We look forward to a guest preacher, Liz Perraud, in November, who will share her take on intentional intergenerational ministry with us.

We are excited about what opportunities will be uncovered as a result of these changes, and we look forward to embarking on the journey of formation together- as the Body of Christ. See you at Common Time!