

## **Sunday School - Program Year Review and Farewell**

### **Eileen Ashe's Presentation at End-of-Program Year Worship Service on June 11, 2023**

I would like to start with a bit of history. Last August, Jared, Heather and I sat around a table with several members of our Christian Education Ministry Team to discuss how we might reopen Sunday School. We all knew that the time was right but it felt very daunting. How could we plan with so many unknowns? Would children and families even come back? And if so, what would families be seeking from Sunday School and church life in a very changed, post-pandemic world?

In the end, we decided to reopen Sunday School on a trial basis, through November - we would re-evaluate at that time. Well, on opening day we celebrated with about 12 children in Sunday School, and they kept right on coming. It was great to see old, familiar, and more grown-up faces after 2 ½ years...also some NEW faces. Shortly thereafter, Sherry joined us as Pastoral Assistant for Church Programming and was tasked with restarting and rejuvenating children's and youth programming. We truly felt that our prayers had been answered - and we were right. Sherry dove right in - asking questions, meeting children and families, helping to recruit Sunday School teachers and volunteers, and learning as much as she could about what was done in the past while planning for the future. We are so grateful for her contagious enthusiasm!

Well, our November timeframe for evaluating our Sunday School program came and went. We celebrated our successful reopening and discussions changed to "how can we keep the participation, enthusiasm and momentum flowing?" Sherry willingly stepped up to lead and organize HER first ever Christmas Pageant and our congregation's first post-pandemic pageant.

"All together" Sundays, a monthly intergenerational worship service organized and orchestrated by Sherry and Jared, began in February. These services have been spectacular and fun for all ages - including creative crafts, a puppet show and special music, among other things. Sherry also assisted Howdy Russell and several other parent volunteers in a very successful outdoor Sunday School exploration program in March - exploring Trillium Farm, the Russell sugarhouse and meeting the spring lambs and goats. These are just a few of the wonderful programs and experiences that Sherry envisioned and created for our "kiddos" - AND adults, alike.

Sherry truly has been instrumental in putting some amazing children's programming in place and has created a path forward for future success and growth of our Sunday School program. We certainly have a lot to celebrate! But I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the huge hole that will be felt after Sherry leaves us. I think I can speak for all our current Sunday School leaders in saying that our Sunday School children are very energetic, spirited, and funny - but also very kind, considerate, thoughtful, and introspective. We learn a lot from each other. We share experiences, joys, and concerns. We plant seeds of kindness. We wash each other's feet. We have fun and we laugh A LOT! Our take-home message is often simple, but profound and foundational. We have no goals and expectations - our only HOPE is that every child has an enriching Sunday School experience - spiritually, socially, and emotionally.

Sunday School volunteer opportunities are numerous. Teaching or assisting in our classroom setting, leading a mission project such as making soup mix in a jar, or sharing a special talent such as pretzel making, or painting friendship rocks are just a few examples of how you can help - maybe you have

other ideas too. I promise that you will feel appreciated, accomplished, and rewarded. We all have special talents and we are never too old to share our gifts - I recently learned that Jimmy Carter taught Sunday School until he was 95 years old, only stopping because of the pandemic in 2020. Please reach out to Jared, Heather, or me if you feel inspired to become involved in shaping the spiritual life of our children - there are truly so many ways that you can help.

So, I think it goes without saying that we will truly miss you, Sherry. On behalf of the Christian Education Ministry Team and the entire congregation, we want to say THANK YOU for everything that you have done to renew, rejuvenate and re-envision our Sunday School program over the past year and to position us well for continuing to move forward into the future. We wish you well and may God bless you and keep you.