

## **Religious Education Annual Report 2019**

### **Submitted by Bethany Vaccaro, DRE**

We have had a fruitful year, and also an intriguing year, opening up many possibilities.

As is often visible during the Story for All Ages, there are days when we are bursting at the seams with kids. What has also been consistent is a bit of fluctuation in our numbers, ranging from days when we serve six children to days when we serve 23.

As it is our goal to be a supplement to the busy lives of our children and families, rather than an added agenda item, I've been happy to see the success of our endeavors to create a program that is welcoming to all, whenever they can come. The shift to becoming truly "drop-in friendly" has been well received. Over and over again, our families have expressed that they feel welcomed and at home here, even when they can't make it all the time.

We currently have 40 children (from Nursery through 8th grade) registered, with an additional 10 approximately who have attended but not completed a formal registration. This year, we've been blessed with eight teachers, who committed to a minimum of three months with our kids, with another 12 congregants supporting RE in additional ways. These folks participated in special events like the Mystery Friend program or came downstairs as a Featured Guest to share their art or music. In total, we've hosted seven special guests, bringing experiences such as art, a gong bath, musical instruments, and yoga to our kids.

This year, we've also had an increased number of multi-gen services, with intentional planning around each one on how to best make the service accessible to children. We average one multi-gen service a month, with some particularly special ones for Christmas, MLK day, Easter, and baby & child blessings.

The two hallmarks of our year are the slow but steady shift we've made away from traditional classroom models to an emphasis on play-based learning, and also, the beginnings of an intentional focus on using the basics of Non-Violent Communication techniques. When a child comes into RE, we want the way we interact with each other to truly reflect our UU principles.

When we tell a child they are a valued and worthy individual, we also show this to them by truly listening to what they share during Joys and Concerns and by honoring their decision making in how they'd like to engage with the day's themes and the larger group during our "Options time." I believe this opens up a space to experience something like play or crafting as a sacred activity, as a representation of our shared values.

The RE Committee and myself have been collecting additional resources to support our volunteers in this transition. Additionally, our new congregation-wide curriculum, Soul Matters, has been an invaluable tool this year, both in bringing RE together thematically with the whole congregation, and in providing enough options for us as a program to adapt it to our specific goals.

We consistently hear from our families that they love what is happening here. The evidence of this is when kids don't want to leave RE at the end of the morning and linger on at the Sculpture Table. It's when one of our grandmothers recently was able to have a meaningful conversation with her grandchild about something she heard in our Easter service. It's providing space for questions, fuel for creativity, and a spark for justice in the world.

This is the evidence of the good work that is happening right now, right here!