

February 2020  
DRE Report to the Board

Dear Board members,

As the news of my departure at the end of this congregational year has reached everyone, I've been hearing such kind things from many members of the congregation. This has started me recollecting on all of the things that have happened over the past two and a half years here. My time here has been powered by the strategy of observing first what is going on, who is coming, and what is happening, before deciding what direction to go in. This observation can take a long time, and it's also something that never ends.

The RE Committee and I are presently discussing the question of what our hard boundaries are during RE. What behavioral lines can't be crossed? This is necessary because it gives both adult volunteers and kids a clear sense of what to expect when they are there. And with the high-energy kids who often join our program, we've had a few situations come up when our loosely-structured style can sometimes devolve into more chaos than we'd like. I see this as a natural growth point for a program like ours, where it actually means our methods are working and we have to continue observing - closely observing - to know where to go next.

It's still useful to ask ourselves, what dominant messages are we sending kids about their time here? That the adults like to smile at them? That we really want them to learn about justice and peace? That we want them to participate in specific ways? That we just want them to have fun? I'm not saying anything is wrong with any of these messages and, certainly, they may all play a role in the complete delivery of RE. But I'm still trying to flip my perspective around to that of a child coming here, so that I can discern where we may not be meeting the needs of who is in the room as well as we could.

We also just tried an experiment with our Mystery Friends program, usually a month-long pen pal program for kids and adults. The expectation of bringing a letter to church every Sunday for four weeks turned out to be a huge burden on parents. Last year, I also had a number of disappointed adults, when their match was one of the kids who only attended sporadically. We hoped that shifting to a one-day event would alleviate this and still make some good connections. We had only five kids who stayed to participate, and although it was a pleasant experience, I don't think it hit the sweet spot I'd like to see.

Again, I think we should go back to observing, what was this like from a kid's perspective? What kind of connection would they want with adults of the congregation? It may be appropriate to ask if this kind of inter-generational programming is truly something that benefits our kids or if it's more for the adults who can't make it down to RE. Again, none of this is to say that how we are doing things is bad. It's more about noticing what's easy and what's not. What works and what doesn't.

With love, Bethany