

Religious Education Program Evaluation: May 6, 2024

This year has been one of expansion with new directions, some new participants, and new connections. Our biggest successes have been in expanding what we offer to different age groups and in continuing to build on our multi-generational gatherings to foster a sense of shared community in the congregation.

Offerings:

OWL training for elementary ages: We hosted a very successful training in November with 14 participants from 9 congregations, including 4 people from our congregation and 3 from Westminster.

OWL class for Kindergarten and 1st grade: Bethany Sorrentino and Melinda Whitaker facilitated our first K/1 OWL class this spring. It was 8 sessions, meeting every Sunday from 11-noon. We had 7 participants, one of whom came down from Warwick.

Dungeons and Dragons: Andrew White hosted a DnD campaign from January thru April for our middle schoolers. It was so highly successful that the kids are continuing to meet on Wednesdays after school just to hang out. Andrew will be joining them again in June to continue their campaign. So now we have a Wednesday middle school youth group!

Summer Program: The Wunder Academy of Metamorphosis is coming alive! We have had two meetings so far with 20 adults who are all ready to jump in and make this program a success. We have verbal confirmation from the families of 14 kids and so far have three official registrations.

Sunday Family Circle, conversations and play: We have expanded our Sunday offerings to include an hour from 11-12 of various activities. We have hosted intentional parent conversations during the kids' OWL class, which were really well attended and met a definite need for parents. We offer extended activities and free play for kids who aren't in a scheduled class.

Gatherings:

Congregational Dinners: These quarterly dinners are a fantastic example of building multi-generational community. And now we even have many people, even kids, helping with clean up at the end.

Solstice Spiral Labyrinth Walk: This continues to be a lovely UUCSC tradition, and I'd like to see it grow into a more multi-gen experience.

Easter service, feast and egg hunt: We have several multi-gen services but this one feels especially family oriented after the service with feasting and egg/scavenger hunts. I'd like to grow this in the future.

May Day Celebration: Our first annual May Day celebration was fabulous and magical. I'm guessing we had 50 people of all generations frolicking in the backyard together. We danced around two :May Poles, made may day crowns, ate yogurt parfaits and watched the magical transformation of violet tea into magenta violet lemonade. Glorious.

Challenges:

Adjusting to changing needs of kids as they move into different stages: This is an ongoing process of assessing needs for different ages. We've realized that we need full-time nursery care again, whereas we haven't needed that in the last two years because all ages circles were working very well. We also really needed something different for our middle schoolers and so now have DnD for them, which is fabulous. We will need to continue to figure out older kid offerings when DnD isn't available and eventually high school offerings as well.

Creating the feeling of being a whole congregation, not segregated: With such a lively family circle downstairs, it often feels like we have a whole separate service in RE. This is really working well for a lot of families, but I think people also feel torn between sitting upstairs and participating downstairs. We will continue to work in TFAs, multi-gen services and also more collaboration on topics and themes that carry over between the two groups.

Finding Nursery Staff: It's possible that Jenny Rebecca might be able to return next fall, which would be amazing. But otherwise, it's been harder than I thought to find a replacement. And for a while it seemed to be working with just me and Simon as staff and lots of parents and some volunteer congregants as the adults in the room. Now it's very apparent that we need staff in the nursery, so the personnel committee is helping me place job postings to find someone.

Creating a new structure for the RE Committee: We have moved away from monthly meetings but haven't figured out our new structure yet. The idea is for me to email the RE Committee with updates, questions and requests for input. Then we'd like to have several long-term planning meetings throughout the year, open to anyone who would like to be involved. These would take place after service, from about 11:15-12:15. We did do this a couple times, just with parents and it worked well. We need to expand the invitation to all congregants. And we need to add in a way for people to help with tasks, projects and volunteering without being on the committee. Like being a "friend" of RE.