

## St Paul's UCC, Oshkosh, finds innovative approach to faith formation for all ages

We don't have that many children in our congregation. For many years we had the traditional style of Sunday School with classes based on age or grade in school and of course it was held on Sunday mornings – sometimes before worship and sometimes at the same time as worship. Our attendance was sporadic for a number of years and at times there was only one child in a class. This just wasn't working for us. We decided we didn't want to eliminate an intentional form of faith formation for children as some churches have done. We needed to come up with a plan that would work for us.

As we discussed the possibilities we zeroed in on our Wednesday night service called The Path that incorporated Confirmation and worship. The Faith Formation Team decided to expand the concept and include the children in this as well. Many of the families would be bringing one of their children to Confirmation on Wednesday nights anyway. We start with a simple meal at 5:30 pm. Participation is voluntary, but most of the families participate!



There are several adults with no children who participate in this meal and service as well, so it isn't just children and their families. Meals are provided by the families who attend and a free will offering is taken to pay for the meal. After supper at 6 pm we gather in the sanctuary and share the story for the night. We then break up into three groups – those in kindergarten and under, those 1st grade up to 6th grade, and 7th grade to adult—to explore the story more. Sometimes we stay together and work on a project. It is very interactive and we will try anything once or maybe even twice! We end the service together.

Over time we've noticed that relationships are certainly building among the generations. The children are excited to participate and take part in the service (I have more volunteers than I need most of the time!).

*By Rev. RaeAnn Beebe*