

## Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

## *We Are Faith Formation*

## Old Testament Lesson

Joshua 4:19-24 (NRSVUE)

<sup>19</sup>The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they camped in Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. <sup>20</sup>Those twelve stones that they had taken out of the Jordan, Joshua set up in Gilgal, <sup>21</sup>saying to the Israelites, "When your children ask their parents in time to come, 'What do these stones mean?' <sup>22</sup>then you shall let your children know, 'Israel crossed over the Jordan here on dry ground.' <sup>23</sup>For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you crossed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea,<sup>[a]</sup> which he dried up for us until we crossed over, <sup>24</sup>so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty and so that you may fear the LORD your God forever."

## Bible/Sermon Focus

We are in our first week of a Sermon Series titled, "We Are Manchester." Our Mission Statement at Manchester UMC is that, "We are called to make a difference for Christ by transforming church and community."

And in this series, we will be looking at different areas of ministry that make up the identity of Manchester UMC, and what our particularities as Manchester UMC, are in those ministry areas, to live into our mission together. This week we are talking about Faith Formation.

Faith formation is sometimes better known as "Christian Education," within a church setting. But because faith formation has to do with more than education, the classification of this ministry has changed over time, within most churches.

One of the most unique aspects of Faith Formation at Manchester UMC is that we make so much curriculum, in house. We don't do this to add extra work on ourselves, but because what is offered by publishing houses, especially for children and youth, does not meet our Faith Formation needs. This is a well known issue for many churches. The pedagogy of our programs is rooted in the Jewish tradition of storytelling, and the Wesleyan tradition of small groups.

Pedagogy is a term used in education that simply means, "the method and practice of teaching." Many churches lean more on a pedagogy known as the "banking model." This is a model, "...in which teachers "deposit" information and skills into students. The emphasis is on memorization of basic facts rather than on understanding and critical thinking."

The issue with the "banking model" within faith formation is that it does not allow the learner to think for themselves. Forming theological thinkers is a deep and important part of Christian education, providing the tools for a person to find God outside of areas not specifically taught. It's how we connect what is happening in our lives, back to our loving creator. And, it also teaches that there is room for questions and diversity within the body of Christ.

Our Wesleyan heritage contains within it the tradition of small groups, like the one we are gathered together for today. Small groups provide the opportunity to mull over scripture and theology together, as the body; while also forming deep bonds with other Christians.

Last year, the Manchester UMC Faith Formation Staff sat down and compiled a list of what was unique about our program here at Manchester UMC. It's not exhaustive, but it does help us better understand who we are as a congregation:

#### **Manchester UMC Faith Formation...**

- Is rooted in an inclusive community.
- Is integrated into the whole life of the church.
- Is LGBTQ+ affirming. All are welcomed and celebrated.
- Has cross over between ministry groups (missions, justice, worship, music).
- Has comprehension, alignment, continuity and connection between age levels.
- Has intentional transitional support.
- Is applicable, relevant, and current.
- Is physically, spiritually, and emotionally safe.
- Offers flexible and accommodating options to suit the needs of a person or family's calendar.
- Offers made in-house curriculum that...
  - Is rooted in Methodism.
  - Is informed, scholarly, and educated.
  - Is age and stage appropriate.
  - Offers theological freedom.
  - Offers loves, grace and inclusion to all.

Our Faith Formation at Manchester UMC has so many faithful leaders, like the leader of the small group you are with right now. Our work extends beyond the staff, with over 100 leaders strong, across age level ministries. The fruit of our collective labor and calling, is something to be witnessed. There is always a place for you to grow in faith and in community at Manchester UMC.

## Discussion Questions

1. What is your favorite part about being in a small group at church?
2. How has your faith formation at Manchester, or other churches, impacted your relationship with God and others?
3. Did you learn anything new about our Faith Formation program that you are excited about?
4. Who were the storytellers, altar builders, and stone carriers in your life?

## Prayer

God of the Bible, God ever so present where two or three or more are gathered. We praise you for carrying us forward in your story. We thank you for the generations that came before us, that taught us your word, that by your grace, met with each other and found Christian community. We pray for our Faith Formation programs and leaders, that they be supported and guided by your hand at all times. Amen.

*"The bottom line for MUMC, and for all churches is that we need stone carrier's, storytellers and altar builders." -Rev. Brenda Stobbe*