

Shared Journeys
Presbytery of Milwaukee
31 October 2017

Apostle Presbyterian Church Gets Charter School

There is a charter school moving into Apostle Presbyterian Church, West Allis. Shared Journeys, the new school project, is halfway to existence. Apostle's Commissioned Ruling Elder Cathy Manthei will guide its path and welcome its birth.

The congregation at Apostle Presbyterian had previously isolated itself to the point of people in the community assuming the church was closed. But the Shared Journeys mission is now at their doorstep and the congregation is welcoming it into their midst.

Shared Journeys is currently housed in the basement of ACL Laboratories on the Aurora Healthcare campus in West Allis. Thirty students attend there. The project is a joint effort of the City of West Allis, the school district of West Allis, and Apostle. Aurora Healthcare pays the rent. The project began many years ago and has evolved to the fantastic success it is today. Cathy knew of Lisa Colla, now her colleague in the program, but was very intimidated by Lisa's credentials. They began praying together, in an effort to understand how they might work together.

The program works with both girls and boys who are parents, teaching them to raise their children and helping them to graduate from high school. Lisa "recruits" in high schools where the students are; the students like Lisa and she weaves them into her life. Simultaneously, Cathy has learned to navigate the mechanics of the joint effort, learning about city government along the way. Cathy and Lisa work as a team in creating a healthy and caring culture for all students and their babies.

Apostle will be opening an infant lab where students can bring their babies. This will be on the first floor of the church. The students can leave their babies for care while they go to classes upstairs. Lisa keeps the students engaged. They host family nights, for example, which draw 12 or 14 young people and their babies. The kids are asked to put their phones away. Instead, they focus on craft projects that they can do collectively or individually. They are given gifts, always books, for the teenage parents to read to their babies.

The program has experienced success. Lisa has a 100% graduation rate. The national average is 52%. The night they graduate they all go to Applebee's together. They get a charm for the tassels on their hats that says SJ. The kids are proud of their accomplishments.

Financing the mission was a bit unnerving, but a foundation found them and underwrites some of their expenses. Lisa and Cathy continue to pray together and often prayed for a millionaire to help them. That eventually happened. The person arrived at Apostle asking many questions and

challenging Cathy about the project. He eventually became involved in their finances as well. Cathy depends on Guide Star to guide her in writing grants. It all helps to overcome the financial challenges.

When Cathy is feeling overwhelmed, she reminds herself that she cannot take her eye off the goal. In her office, she has photos of the students and she touches the photos when she needs inspiration. The lure of time off is strong, but she is dedicated and determined.

The Session at Apostle voted to have Shared Journeys move into the church. They then announced it to the congregation. The benefit to the congregation is that the legacy of the church will continue. The congregation has been very cooperative, with many departments and groups sharing space with the mission. Many ask how they can help. It is healthy for the congregation.

Lisa models mutual respect, and gets the kids to like school. The impact is that she has saved lives. She and Cathy are together as a team for a reason, and that is their passion of kids and education and love..

To quote Cathy, "We are just walking each other home."