

Rediscovering Joy in The Midst COVID-19

A Children's Ministry Update

This Program Year we are maintaining the posture of virtual formation, with the emphasis on innovative ways to create connection. Using our success of Virtual Hogwarts Vacation Bible School as a springboard for effective Virtual Curriculum, we will continue to use a combination of Zoom, Pre-record videos, and physical supply bags, as we approach this coming Program Year.

Registration for Children Formation will go live this week, along with a newsletter to parents that will highlight the “freedom” and “joy” of this coming Program Year.

“Joy” and “Freedom” aren’t words most people would associate with the time period we are in. During my vacation, and subsequently prayer time, I struggled to find joy, and I rarely felt free. After all, I miss my kids, I miss my teachers, my families, and I miss the normalcy of running around the church looking for coffee. I long for the day when I can safely walk out of the sanctuary with kids trailing behind me.

Therefore, planning this Program Year felt like being in a constant battle against grief, and an endless series of cancellations. I felt trapped by the limits of today’s world. Then one night, when I had lost the battle, hands up, tears down, I gave in to the grief. At some point my thoughts became prayers, and it was there God met me. There was no judgement, no admonishment of any kind, but rather God grieved with me. God put arms around me and simply said “I know.” It was a healing form of knowing, the kind where you feel not only seen but understood. In a time where intimacy feels rare and even dangerous, I needed to be invited back into a place where being held felt safe, and where grief was shared.

That night God also gave me three visions. Each one had “one” word, and one image. The visions became the foundation for this Program Year’s Formational Curriculum.

The first thing I heard was: Frame-Work. How has the cross framed how we interact with the world, and what is the work it is calling us to do? 4th/5th graders will be facing those questions. They will be walking with the disciples as the face of grief, and the endless possibilities of what comes next after the ascension of Jesus. In the “Frame-Work” of scripture we will be spending the year wondering about what faith looks like now and ask God to help us envision the next steps for the “church.” Through the lens of the disciples, apostles, and early church formation, we will be framing our own stories in this time of change and creating a 4th/5th grade book. At the end of the program year, they will also be holding their own Council of Nicaea, and creating their own vision for the church in the context of our current “Frame-work” of change that COVID-19 has brought. They will ask the question: how is God using this to call us to the work of the “Cross” and what is my part in that?

2nd/3rd graders will be on a similar journey, but for them it will be one rooted in the Old Testament. The vision I got for them was “Originator.” I found myself sitting in the

juxtaposition of the origins, or foundational traditions, we hold dear and the innovative time period we are in. How do we maintain our identity as a people in a time of being forced into an unknown wilderness, and how is this journey calling us to change, to create new traditions—to redefine our identity in God?

Those were just some of the questions the Israelites were facing as they followed Moses into the wilderness. Therefore, our 2nd/3rd graders will be joining the Israelites on the journey into wilderness. They will be facing every changing “timelines” for the promise land, as they navigate their own changes to everyday life. We will be rooting them in the origins of God’s faithfulness in the wilderness so that they can be free to be innovative in the way they see their own wilderness of COVID-19.

We will be using a very hands-on virtual approach to this journey. We will be creating ways for children to bring the Bible to life at home. For instance, we will be making food the Israelites ate, building wilderness architecture, and inspiring conversations about how the ten commandments apply to our daily lives or even if they do. They will have a final project at the end of the year that is designed to inspire them to tell the world what they learned on the journey. They will be answering the question: “how will they pass down their wilderness stories for the next generation to learn from?”

As you can guess, this year is very focused on story, context, and the creation of our own stories. Throughout the year we will be asking questions and wondering together. Our preschooler-1st graders will be no exception. We will still be using Godly Play Curriculum but with a focus on empowering children to become story-tellers. We will be sending home ways for families to touch and recreate the Godly Play stories. We will also be using zoom to inspire children to teach us. This will be the generation that normalizes and become inspired by this period of time. We have a lot to learn from a generation that will see joy in being able to spend more time at play. We want to give them the platform to using their own voices in the context of being filled with wonder.

Therefore, this year’s vision for our youngest members of formation is “Wonder-Full” or in other words...we will give the freedom to be filled with wonder, and to more importantly share that wonder with us.

I am no longer looking at the “limitations” but rather the freedom this year will bring. We will be able to do Children Formation in a way we have never been able to do before. We will be able to invite people to participate in teaching that have never been able to because of time limits. We will be teaching children how to invite God into everyday conversations, to use scripture as a lens to see the world, and to find faith at home.

We will have the freedom to be innovative, to encourage our kids to be innovative, and most importantly we get to dream together with a limitless God.

Will it be challenging—absolutely! I will be working harder than ever creating new ways of formation, and I will need help to do so. Will there be grief—yes. I will still miss the former

way of teaching. But there will also be joy! There will be opportunities to connect with each other and God in a way we would have never been able to.

When we take away buildings, set schedules, and come back to the basics, we are invited to a space with a creative God. A God who saw a void and sung a world into being. It is a joyous, limitless place where any connections are powerful and where we can dream together about what the next chapter of the story will look like.

Therefore, I will be focusing on the unlimited ways we can do Children Formation this year, and I invite you to do the same: dream with me, pray with me, grieve with me, and keep me accountable to joy.