

“Celebrating the Blessing of Faith Formation Ministry”

Proverbs 1:1-6; Romans 15:4, 16:17; 2 Timothy 3:14-17
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Pastor Cathy L Hamblin
Hayward United Methodist Church

Call to Worship Deuteronomy 5:1; Proverbs 4:13; 8:32-35

Moses called all Israel together. He said to them, **“Attention, Israel. Listen obediently to the rules and regulations I am delivering to your listening ears today. Learn them. Live them.”**

Solomon wrote: “Hold on to instruction; don’t slack off; protect it, for it is your life. Now children, listen to me: Happy are those who keep to my ways! **Listen to instruction, and be wise; don’t avoid it. Happy are those who listen to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorposts. Those who find me find life; they gain favor from the LORD.**”

Prayer of Invocation

Gracious God , we gather in joyful expectation of encounter with you as we worship in community, and hear again the record of your love and faithfulness as revealed in scripture. **We pray that your Holy Spirit will inspire our minds to interpret your word. Lord, open us to all that you would have us be for you and for others. Breakthrough into our lives and our church with new possibilities. Amen.**

The Word Proverbs 1:1-6; Romans 15:4, 16:17; 2 Timothy 3:14-17 The proverbs of Solomon, King David’s son, from Israel: Their purpose is to teach wisdom and discipline, to help one understand wise sayings. **They provide insightful instruction, which is righteous, just, and full of integrity. They make the naive mature, the young knowledgeable and discreet.**

The wise hear them and grow in wisdom; those with understanding gain guidance. They help one understand proverbs and difficult sayings, the words of the wise, and their puzzles. **Whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction so that we could have hope through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures.**

Brothers and sisters, I urge you to watch out for people who create divisions and problems against the teaching that you learned. Keep away from them. **But you must continue with the things you have learned and found convincing. You know who taught you.**

Since childhood you have known the holy scriptures that help you to be wise in a way that leads to salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus. **Every scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for showing mistakes, for correcting, and for training character, so that the person who belongs to God can be equipped to do everything that is good.**

Living the Word

Last week was such a joy for me. I love to celebrate! For the next six week we will be Celebrating the of the Ministries of this church. We will do some review of what we have been able to accomplish in these ministries since last year and look forward to what lies before us in the next year.

Our four ministries include: Faith Formation (or Christian Education), Nurture and Caring, Music and Worship, Missions and Outreach. Our church can continue to grow and celebrate these ministries each year only by your prayers, your presence, your financial gifts, your service and your witness to others about the good news of what we can do together as a church.

That sounded like an official church statement from your pastor...and it was, but let's move on to the celebration part! . One Sunday this summer after one of the Holy Spirit's more creative services (note that I am not taking the credit) as I was shaking hands, someone said to me "That was really 'fun.'

Once again I heard traditional voices whispering in my ear: "Fun? Worship isn't supposed to be fun! This is serious stuff we are dealing with here." Then I mentally wiped my brow with a 'whew.' I am glad we are a fun church, able to handle all of the serious stuff within a positive attitude, and we do have a lot to celebrate.

Over the next six Sundays I invite you to listen for a place that you might be able to fulfill your relationship with God and with this church within these ministries, and then take time to pray about it, and then talk to me about how to plug into the system. There is room for all in the celebration pool!

Today we have Faith Formation which used to be Education, before us. As I am developing new understandings, with the name change from Education, I keep asking myself how I define the difference. In education we gather knowledge, yet in forming our faith we gather understanding. It is more of being convinced of what you have been taught.

There are ways to know God. John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Church, called those 'Means of Grace.' One of the best ways to know and then begin to understand someone is to spend time with them, so one of the 'Means of Grace' is prayer.

Another way is reading scriptures of the Bible. You can memorize the words and know them, but it is forming your faith if you can think them through and wrap your mind around them. In 'the Word' we read together today, something Paul wrote to the Romans (chapter 15), it says: "*Whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction so that we could have hope through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures.*"

Other ways of knowing God are through Baptism and Holy Communion, celebrating creation as you see a sunrise or sunset, the trees as they turn color and in loving babies. The Means of Grace are very experiential as we gather the blessings that God has for us and we realize how blessed we are.

Have you ever felt the presence of someone before you saw them, but you already knew who it was? It is that way with God. As you become more familiar with God's presence around you, it is easier to be convinced of the Creator, who is always present.

For thousands of years, from the ancient oral traditions passing down God's word, through the families and the tribes, to today as we gift Bibles to our grandchildren and youth with the latest translations in a more contemporary language, God is still present. Within the Bible are three truths that are a part of forming our faith: 1. God is always with me. 2. Jesus loves me. 3. The Spirit guides me.

As children we hear and repeat in some form 'Jesus loves me, ' 'God is always with me' and as we get a little older that we are guided by God; which would be through the Holy Spirit. The three together are the Trinity and all apart of God.

The Ministry of Faith Formation at HUMC has numerous parts. Beginning with the infants and children – we offer nursery care around worship services, staffed by qualified care givers, but they also play with the children and in the back round the worship service is being piped in through audio.

Our Sunday School program

Is available when children are present. After the children's message, several qualified teacher are ready to take them into a classroom where lessons are planned and ready for a one room class setting of mixed age levels. How much do they understand of that?

They hear the songs and the choir, they hear us pray together and the Word being read and talked on. This might not be retained by their young minds, but some of it might. They can also learn that the church is a safe place where they meet and make friends. they know exactly where it is happening for them at the church!

It is fairly obvious that not many children visit and attend Sunday School lessons, yet we see a fair amount of grandchildren, some who will even share songs from their Sunday Schools in their churches back home. For all of the rest of us, it is not true that when you finish Confirmation or youth group that you don't need to grow your faith any more in your life. When we become adults the responsibility is no longer on our parents for everything in life. So, we are responsible for ourselves? That works for continuing to form our faith.

There are many different avenues that we as a church offer: Weekly Bible Study is on Wednesdays at 11 am. Currently it is a 30 minute video that takes us to locations in the holy land to discover the stories behind the places, including how and why certain things in the Bible were written in a specific way.

Several weeks ago, we were able to realize how strategic locations between mountains and the sea gave only one travel and trade route from Europe and Asia to Africa. That journey was called the Via Maria and ran from above the Sea of Galilee, past Jerusalem and below the Dead Sea. So whomever had control of the major cities along that route, basically ruled the world – at least the world as they knew it.

In essence God placed the Hebrew people at the crossroads of the world. They had influence on everyone who passed through there for thousands of years. The Bible study went on to say that those people were called to influence the Pagan cultures around them; those cultures that stayed and those just passing through.

We then discussed where is Hayward on the map? If you look at Wisconsin or the whole country, we are pretty much off out here by ourselves. Even so, when you begin to consider how many people from all over the world come to visit or to stay here...it is amazing! So the question is who are we called as Christians to influence in our part of the world? And how are we doing as hosts of the world to touch the lives of those who pass this way?

Do you understand that however you came here, by birth, by vacations, by retirement. For this moment you are here to make a Christian difference to the world and the culture around you. That is a Biblical lesson that I have been pondering for 3 weeks for myself. It is a check-up on my life and what I am to be about in this place. How about you? God has offered you the opportunity to influence the world, from little ol' Hayward Wisconsin. That is something to ponder this week!

Like the children in nursery, adults are also invited to find new ways to form and reform their faith in worship. It is Bible Study: some teachings, praising God and prayer. Our ministries are why this church exists: Faith Formation, Missions and Outreach, Nurture and Caring, Music and Worship.

Where are you on your faith journey? Are you still on a faith journey? Proverbs 4:13 says this: *"Hold on to instruction; don't slack off; protect it, for it is your life."* We need to hold on to what we have learned in the past and continue to develop who we are so we have the strength to persevere when life hits a rough spot. Forming our faith doesn't end.

As a young adult in college I was feeling like I owned the world. Oh, I was broke like most are at that age, but I was now my own person, really making my own choices. Everyone my age used swear words – not the same ones they use today – but it seemed 'cool' and I did because I could. It took me some time, but I realized I didn't need to use those words to emphasize who I was.

I don't think that I consciously thought about the three truths of God's presence, Jesus' love or the Spirit's guidance, but I do know they were the base of my decision making. I like the way Paul puts it in Ephesians 4:17-24, and I especially like reading it from the Message Version: *"And so I insist—and God backs me up on this—that there be no going along with the crowd, the empty-headed, mindless crowd. They've refused for so long to deal with God that they've lost touch not only with God but with reality itself. They can't think straight anymore. Feeling no pain, they let themselves go in sexual obsession, addicted to every sort of perversion."*

But that's no life for you. You learned Christ! My assumption is that you have paid careful attention to him, been well instructed in the truth precisely as we have it in Jesus. Since, then, we do not have the excuse of ignorance, everything—and I do mean everything—connected with that old way of life has to go. It's rotten through and through. Get rid of it! And then take on an entirely new way of life—a God-fashioned life, a life renewed from the inside and working itself into your conduct as God accurately reproduces his character in you.

Paul also writes in 2 Timothy 3:14-17 *"But you must continue with the things you have learned and found convincing. You know who taught you. Since childhood you have known the holy scriptures that help you to be wise in a way that leads to salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus. Every scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for showing mistakes, for correcting, and for training character, so that the person who belongs to God can be equipped to do everything that is good."*

Where did you begin forming your faith? Was it at church? OR Who did you learn from? Where did they learn? Have you been convinced? 1. That God is ever with you – good and bad? 2. That Jesus says you are forgiven? If you acknowledge your wrongs you can move on to reconciliation and peace? 3. Are you convinced that if you totally rely on the Holy Spirit to guide your life you will receive the best blessings?

Faith Formation is a life-long endeavor. We never stop growing in love with God through our faith. John Wesley often spoke of moving on to perfection. In his journals he wrote he only knew one person that possibly made it to perfection in their life. Who decides perfection? Surely the Creator, not us!

I believe we are a church that nurtures life-long growth in faith. We aren't perfect as a church anymore than we are perfect as individuals, yet our ministry of Faith Formation is ever changing to help each of us grow our faith. What an honor to be a part of self-growth as we help others grow as well!
Let's Celebrate! We are blessed...