

**CHRISTIAN FORMATION**  
**Tommie Moore**  
**Director of Christian Formation**

**For children 3 years old – 8<sup>th</sup> grade**

In the fall of 2023, the decision was made to change to a formation curriculum recommended by the Diocese of Mississippi, "Weaving God's Promises". "Weaving God's Promises" features class sessions structured around the Holy Eucharist as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer, special sessions for the church seasons and special holidays/feast days. The curriculum has been revised with an emphasis on inclusiveness and "New Beloved Community" activities to help children and youth consider the social justice implications of each lesson. Using a different model than we have in the past, formation for our older youth in upper Middle School and High School was moved to their EYC time on Sunday evenings. Guiding the formation of our children on Sunday mornings are Tess Huwe, Liddi pate and Leslie Wood in the 3 year old – Kindergarten class; Emory Bryson and Cindy Smith in the 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class; and Sue Ann Averett, Allison Bedillion and Leila Keel in the 4<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade class.

During 2023, we continued offering Catechesis of the Good Shepherd for our children and youth on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday evenings of each month. Certified catechists, Kamme Riddle and Marrion Winders, assisted by Lilly Riddle spent time with the children in this Montessori model, guiding the child's work with materials designed to help develop and deepen the child's religious life.

Vacation Bible School for all ages was offered in mid-June in the evening. "ReNew, A Green VBS" was directed by Leslie Wood and Alice Alexander. ReNew is an environmentally focused VBS program whose purpose was to inspire kids and adults to grow in faith, have fun, and change the world as they practice stewardship of creation. Programs and activities for children and adults plus dinner were provided each night. Thank you to Leslie and Alice and all who organized this offering, taught the classes, prepared the meals and for those who participated.

In the Fall, Phillip and Becca offered confirmation classes for adults and youth. Bishop Seage confirmed three adults and two youth during his annual visitation on All Saints' Sunday.

Our Sunday Lectionary class continues to meet each Sunday at 9:30 a.m. in the south breakout room of the Parish Hall. In 2023, Les Alvis and Caleb Bedillion led the class which featured a presentation on selected texts from the scriptures appointed for the day's liturgy, followed by a discussion of the readings to find meanings for today. A weekly email outlining the scripture readings for the upcoming Sunday is sent each week. Contact the church office to be added to the group's weekly email list.

Theology in the Library, led by Fr. Phillip, continues to meet in the Library on Sunday mornings at 9:30. This class explores the impact of faith in everyday life, and how theology played an integral role in evaluating decisions being made.

Two special studies were offered for adults during Lent:

Frances Hart led a discussion of the book, "Ladder to the Light", by Choctaw elder and Episcopal priest Steven Charleston, who offered words of hard-won hope, rooted in daily conversations with the Spirit and steeped in Indigenous wisdom.

A book study led by Becca, "Searching for Sunday", by Rachel Held Evans, discussed what it means to love, leave, and find church. The group explored their lives as people of both faith and doubt, bound together in the body of Christ.

Special discussion/studies were offered for adults during Advent:

A discussion of Paula Gooder's book *The Meaning is in the Waiting: The Spirit of Advent*, led by Becca. Discussions centered around how we experience waiting in our relationship with God, and how we can prepare our hearts for the nativity.

Throughout the year, the Lectionary class hosted several weeknight "Experiencing the Scriptures" discussions. Topics included: "Preparing for Holy Week Together: The Seven Last Words of Christ"; "David and Goliath, Beyond the Children's Story"; "Psalms"; and "Translations of the Bible". As we approached Advent, "An Order for the Evening, A Reading of The Revelation to John" was offered where we heard lectors read the entire Book of Revelation. Discussion sessions led by Phillip and Les Alvis were offered on Thursday evenings during Advent.

Education for Ministry (EfM) is a unique four-year distance learning certificate program in theological education based upon small-group study and practice. EfM helps the faithful encounter the breadth and depth of the Christian tradition and bring it into conversation with their experiences of the world as they study, worship, and engage in theological reflection together. Our EfM participants continued their studies during the spring semester of 2023 and finished their year in May, with Harry Dieckmann serving as the mentor of the group. We deeply appreciate Harry stepping up to lead this course and his mentorship has meant a great deal to the participants. EfM took a break in the fall of 2023, but we hope to again offer the course in the fall of 2024. Watch for details later in the spring.

My deepest thanks to all who volunteer their time in our Christian Formation offerings. They take the time each week to prepare and study lessons and they show up weekly to engage, discuss and connect the participants with what scripture is teaching. I also want to thank Michelle Hester who, before moving to North Carolina, served as our Coordinator for Children's Ministries. Her tireless efforts in pulling together schedules, recruiting teachers, researching curriculum and making sure the teachers had the supplies and materials they needed was a tremendous help to me and a valuable resource for our children's ministries.

Due to the Fall 2023 break in offering EfM, our expenses were less than anticipated. In 2023, Christian Formation requested \$4,350 for Sunday School curriculum and supplies, EfM mentor training, scholarships, books and supplies and Vacation Bible School lesson plans, arts/craft supplies and meals. Due to 2023 operating budget constraints, \$350. was given to the Christian Formation operating budget, with \$4,000 of our request to be obtained from the Christian Formation money market account. Of the amount requested, we spent a total of \$2,806.57.