

# Dwelling in Faith Dinner Church: A Wild and Crazy Idea

*Worshippers at Faith, Mitchell embrace teen's idea to keep ministry alive in a new way*

by Karis Nye

"What would you do if you could try anything?" That was the question that my mom asked me that sparked the idea for Dwelling in Faith Dinner Church.

When my mom asked me that question, I was in the middle of expressing my frustration and disappointment that Faith Lutheran Church in Mitchell, Iowa is going to close. We have only lived here for a couple of years, but I have found a welcome at Faith. I wanted there to be more that we could do to continue ministry in Mitchell even as we knew that the particular ministry of Faith Lutheran Church was ending. So when my mom asked me what I would do, I shared my dream for a redesigned space and ministry.

My idea was something wildly different than what Faith had been. I went to the church council with a plan to redesign the sanctuary for a new type of worship and fellowship. We took out all the pews and set up big round tables with comfortable chairs. We made a space especially for kids with their own table and sensory toys. Right there in the sanctuary we put a coffee bar filled with coffee, tea, and hot chocolate. We turned the walls into a rotating art gallery made up of shadow boxes that everyone can contribute to. My hope was to create a space where everyone would feel welcome — whether or not "church" is a natural home.

Dwelling in Faith is now a space for intergenerational worship and community engagement. When people gather on Wednesday evenings for dinner church, they are called to wor-



Karis Nye, right, and other members of Cross Roads Lutheran Parish gather for worship around tables and refreshments at Faith, Mitchell.

ship by the scent of freshly baked bread. Children and adults of all ages find a comfy seat at one of the round tables. We take a sacred first bite together and hear the promise that our sins are forgiven. In this setting, designed with community in mind, we gather to discuss Bible stories and our daily lives. The Bible texts we talk about are the ones that are especially strange or challenging. We use art work and other forms of media to explore more of the story. For each course of the meal— from appetizers to desserts— we get a chance to talk with one another and explore our faith together.

Dessert is always a favorite time for those gathered! We have an activity, craft, or game that relates to the story that we just talked about. People bring their own games too, and we have time to play together while enjoying a sweet treat.

---

"When I look around the sanctuary and see it filled with life-long church goers and folks who would never otherwise come to church talking together about faith, I know God is doing good things here."

---

My mom and I often talk about Dwelling in Faith as a "Holy Spirit thing" because once I shared the idea, God provided to make it a reality through many different people. God is still working through a lot of different people to make this wild and crazy idea possible!

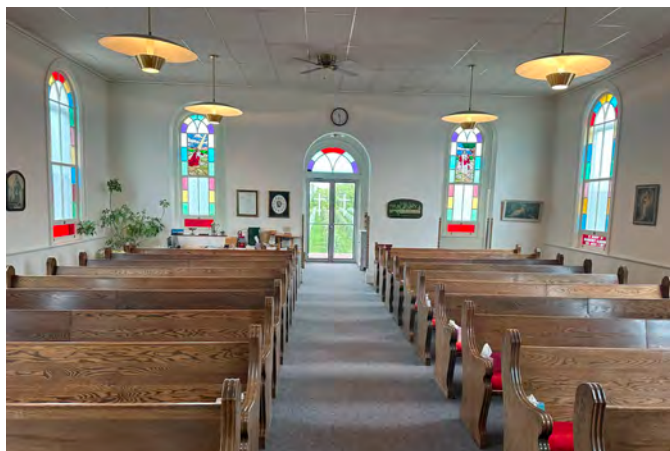
>> Continued on page 14

The congregation at Faith has been bold to agree to dramatically change their sanctuary space at the end of that congregation's life in order for a new kind of ministry to be born. In fact, with some of their last money, Faith is purchasing more tables so that there will be even more space for this ministry to grow! (It is such a wonderful problem to need more chairs!)

The Cross Roads Lutheran Parish, which Faith is part of, has embraced this new idea and people are taking turns providing the meals. The parish confirmation class has been experimenting with what confirmation can look like when it happens in the context of this new intergenerational setting. Some people still have questions—and I know that there is some anxiety that changing the sanctuary, reimagining worship, and revamping confirmation is giving up too much of what we know and love about our Lutheran traditions—but when I look around the sanctuary and see it filled with life-long church goers and folks who would never otherwise come to church talking together about faith, I know God is doing good things here.

When I first proposed this wild and crazy idea, I asked for a year to try it out while Faith worked on closing. Faith has voted on holy closure and held their last regular Sunday morning service on Dec. 24. I don't know what will happen to Dwelling in Faith in the future. I am thankful, though, that the plan for holy closure includes Faith continuing to own the building through 2024 to continue this experiment.

***Karis Nye is a home-schooled sophomore and member of Cross Roads Lutheran Parish, where Karis' parents serve as pastors.***



Parishioners replaced the sanctuary pews at Faith, Mitchell, with round tables and comfortable chairs (below) to begin Dwelling in Faith Dinner Church in September as a new way to worship. Faith's Service of Holy Closure is set for June 30; however, the tables will remain as Cross Roads Lutheran Parish considers ways to use the building for ongoing ministry.



Worshippers share refreshments, art, and conversation during Dwelling in Faith Dinner Church at Faith, Mitchell.