

# **Pastor's Annual Report: 2024**

Nikki Ramage, Associate Pastor of Adult Ministries and Spiritual Growth

*12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 I do not call you servants, any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing, but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father (John 15:12-15)*

This year of ministry has been marked by friendship: friendship with God, friendship with ninety year olds, friendship with young adults, friendship with women in recovery, friendship with new believers, friendship with doubters, and friendship with the Holy Spirit. Jesus calls us His friends. He does not call us servants any longer. We are empowered and equipped by the living God to do the same things that Jesus did, to love one another as Jesus loved, to pursue forgiveness, healing, restoration, new life, and wholeness in Jesus' name. We are called to be bearers of God's good news of salvation for the whole world, and are set free to participate in the work of Jesus' in-breaking kingdom. As friends with Jesus we have the high calling of loving one another as He has loved us. I have seen this love on display by you all this year. I am grateful.

## **Adult Education**

The explicit goal of Encounter this year was to reflect on what it means to seek first the kingdom of God. As God's kingdom citizens how are we called to live? What values are we to embody?

- *Encounter-Seek First the Kingdom of God (Fall)*- This Fall, we considered how to seek God's kingdom first through kingdom tools of prayer, in our pursuits of justice, through wise engagement in culture, through evaluation of Christian nationalism, and through reflecting on global Christianity.
- *Encounter- Our Citizenship is in Heaven(Spring)*- This Spring (it is still happening) we are exploring kingdom values of justice for the most vulnerable, generosity vs. consumerism, love for the stranger, hopeful realism in political engagement, and healthy relationships.

## **Small Groups**

Small groups continue to be an amazing vehicle for people to live out their faith in community. I wanted to highlight some small groups which have brought new life to the body:

- *Young Men's Bible Study*- Led by Pastor Jake, their theme is "Highways," a reference to Psalm 84:5 "Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion." Each week they use a different scripture to encourage each other, forming highways in their hearts to be led closer to God.
- *Faith and Doubt*- In this multigenerational group, we have been exploring the reality of doubt in the life of faith. We have been pursuing God in the midst of our questioning.
- *Discipleship Ecosystem Trilogy*- Pastor Colleen has been leading her small group in going through Pastor Denny's trilogy of books on spiritual formation and thriving faith. What does life-giving discipleship look like as compared to toxic discipleship?

## Young Adult Leadership Lab

- YALL started May 2023 with a retreat at Westmont College where we were able to meet other young adult ministries from other churches and learn about the spiritual and life challenges and gifts of young adulthood. The YALL team members are: Kaylie Grant, Travis Smelley, Mary Woodyard, Matt Smith, and I am the pastoral lead. Sarah Garland, a young adult at our church, is the Assistant Director of the program at Westmont.
- The first year of the YALL cohort was devoted to listening and learning from young adults. We have met monthly as a YALL leadership team to build team rapport, review materials from YALL retreat, and plan outreach and engagement events for young adults. We have built trust with young adults in our community through fellowship events specifically for young adults, hosted church wide events led by young adults utilizing their gifts, and met individually with young adults over meals and coffee to hear about their stories, challenges and faith journeys.
- Our goal is to empower and equip young adults to live vibrant lives of faith in the midst of this tumultuous life stage as well as help them to find ways to serve and contribute at all levels of church life. Great examples of young adults serving and leading are in worship, on our boards, in small groups, in ministry teams, in starting and leading Peace Prayers, and in creating a service of lament. We want to generously invest in young adults while they are with us and send them out to lead and serve wherever God might call them.

## Ministry/Spiritual Growth

- *Women's Ministry*- We have increased our variety of events for increased fellowship throughout the year. Looking forward to our upcoming women's retreat focused on new life and grateful for our time with Light and Life West at our women's retreat last year.
- *Senior Lunch*- Senior Lunch continues to flourish with a twice a month gourmet lunch and fun program for seniors in our community. We talked about Bitcoin, heard from Father Larry, pondered the kingdom of God, sang our hearts out, and learned about other parts of the world. We try to create as loving and fun of an environment as possible! Thanks to the stellar work of our volunteers!
- *Parish Health*-Continue to visit and care for seniors and vulnerable members of our congregation, as well as reaching out to people undergoing surgery or with medical complications. This ministry of presence is so important to the mission of our church.
- *Santa Barbara Mission Conference*- Free Methodist had the most church members sign up and attend than any other church. As a board member we had the privilege of helping shape the conference to narrow its focus to local justice issues and local justice practitioners.
- *Interns*- We love our interns and are raising them up to be the next generation of leaders!
- *Transition House*-lead a team to prepare a meal for families served at TH every other month.
- *Bethel House*- Weekly, I lead a bible study for women in recovery at Bethel House.
- *Ministerial Education and Guidance Board*: I continue to serve on the conference board raising up new pastors in our conference.

I give God praise that we get to be on mission together. You are my dear and treasured brothers and sisters in Christ. Much love!! -Pastor Nikki