

# Prospectus The Ark

## *A New Program of Spiritual Enrichment for Children*

### Goals:

1. We want our youngest members to know that they are loved and valued as children of God and full members of our community.
2. We expect that participating adults will experience the positive impact sharing their relationship with God has on the lives of our children.

### Rationale and Guiding Philosophy

In the past, education programs implemented by churches were constructed along the same lines as educational institutions – provide useful information to students about the Christian Faith through Bible stories, church history and the example of notable Christian individuals. The problem with embracing the institutional school paradigm is twofold:

- First, the Christian Faith is not primarily about mastering a body of information – it is the growth of profoundly transformative relationships with God, self, and others. Such relationships are not taught, they are grown and nurtured through trusting, self-disclosing and repeated engagement with others in an atmosphere of mutual respect and enjoyment.
- Second, the most that a Christian educator can hope for is about 20 hours of engagement in the course of a regular school year. That ideal does not take into account the increasing complexity of children’s lives: family outings and vacations over which they have no control, competing extra curricular activities scheduled on Sunday mornings such as sports programs, and the reality of “shared parenting time” when children are mandated to the care of a non-resident parent often in another community. The limited time we have with children is precious and must be used to greatest advantage to benefit the child.

Robert Coles, the well known Harvard child psychologist, reports in his book *The Spiritual Life of Children* that most children have a significant spiritual experience by the time they are five years old. **The Ark** is designed to support and nourish that experience by emphasizing the establishment of nurturing relationships with self and others in the community of faith. We believe that it is in the nature of God to be in relationship, and that our capacity to create healthy relationships is part of our reflection of the image of God. Jesus’ summary of the law indicates that all productive human behavior is grounded in right relationships: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.* (Matthew 22:37-40)

We believe that the commandment to love is being obscured in contemporary life by conflicting and competing claims on our emotions: the push to acquire, to compete or to advocate for sides in adversarial political or cultural struggles. We further believe that it is the responsibility of mature

communities of faith to actively engage in respectful and safe relationships with children, affirming their vital place in the community, and modeling for them what healthy relationships look and feel like, thereby giving them a sense of equity in that community's well being.

We find that one helpful model for that work is found in the Old Testament story of Noah's Ark – a safe haven in a stormy world where we are all different, all together.

## **Method**

The “curriculum” for The Ark is the active participation and engagement of the children among us by the worshipping members of Saint Luke the Physician in Gresham, Oregon. St. Luke's is a mature and diverse congregation of individuals and families who come from many walks in life. They possess a remarkable array of skills and abilities and have a commitment to engaging with the world around them as benefactors, both individually and corporately. St. Luke's is an Episcopal Church of the Diocese of Oregon but its members come from a wide variety of denominational and interfaith backgrounds, bringing genuine richness to our common life. St. Luke's is progressive in its thinking, welcoming and open in its stance and generous in its attitude. We are proud to be a *Believe Out Loud* church and welcome everyone regardless of race, age, national origin or sexual orientation.

The Ark embraces the two commandments mentioned above that Jesus emphasized: love God and love people. We currently exercise a two year cycle. This year, Year One, we focus on how we express our love for God. In the 2018-9 season, we will focus on how we express our love for people. As we stated above, our members are our curriculum. Each Sunday, a participating member of the congregation will spend time with our children sharing how they express their love for God in their own lives. By discussing their faith actions in language that children can grasp and understand, our participating adults articulate often unexamined but deeply felt commitment thus “giving reason for the hope that is within them.” (I Peter 3:15)

In the process, the children engage with adults in the congregation on a personal and intimate level, the foundation of all healthy relationships. Those adults will then nurture those budding relationships with children as friends in our common worship, enriching and expanding their own congregational ties.

Community worship and the Ark begin simultaneously on Sundays at 10:00 am. Our Sunday School coordinator, Kathy Terry (who has completed the Diocese of Oregon's mandated Safe Church Training), will meet the children with her assistants in the St. Mary Room on the lower level of St. Luke's. While they are together, adults begin their worship hour in the Church itself with the reading of lessons and the sermon (often the hardest part of worship for little ones to sit through). At the community's Exchange of Peace, the children rejoin their parents in the Church for the celebration of the Eucharist, the great Christian Family meal. Naturally, all children are welcome to receive this meal as they are cherished members of the family. When children come to Church the following Sunday they will be able to engage adult participants as familiar “companions in the Way,” members of their expanding family in God.