

FROM THE *Pastor's Desk*

Dear Friends in Christ,

What a gift it is to have a community of faith with whom to celebrate the wonder and beauty of Christmas, the gift of Jesus! Christmas in the Church always feels kind of like a homecoming when we see family and friends that are home for Christmas. And there is a great joy being in a room full of people singing songs that we all know and love. It was a great pleasure to have a choir of over 20 members singing the message of Christmas on December 14.

And it is always wonderful to have a group of children to share in the joy of Christmas. We had a good group of children sharing the message of Christmas on the last Sunday in Advent. I really enjoy seeing how many children have become involved in our ministry with youth and children.

In a medium-sized congregation like Immanuel, the number of children will tend to increase and decrease from year to year. When I came to Immanuel 11 years ago, we had a good number of children involved in worship and Sunday School. Then we kind of went through a valley with very few children participating. Now our numbers are stronger again. We had over 20 children involved with our Christmas program not including the younger ones who joined in on "Away in a Manger." I have a feeling we will seek peaks and valleys in the years ahead.

I am so very grateful to the adults who have been serving as leaders in our ministry with youth and children. However, as I look to the future, I think I see some changes that are needed. The way we are doing ministry now is not very sustainable. We are relying on a few adults who will not be able to sustain their current involvement indefinitely. I am thinking especially about our JAM ministry with preschoolers and first and second graders and our LYO ministry with high schoolers. We are not likely to find people willing to step in and carry the load in the same way that our current leaders have served.

Our ministry would be much more sustainable if we had teams of people willing to serve instead of just a few individuals carrying the load. That is the way youth ministry was done when I was in high school. We had several couples who served together for just a few years at a time with a new couple rotating in every year or so.

As I think about the future of JAM ministry with our little ones and LYO ministry with our older youth, I envision 3 or 4 couples with each group working together, taking turns, and showing our young people the breadth of our congregation's commitment to them. It does take a congregation (faith village) to share faith with our young people.

In 2026, I hope that we will begin to find members who are willing to join with others to take our ministry with children and youth to the next level and make it sustainable for the future. Do you know someone who would consider becoming more involved with our ministry with children and youth?

Yours in Christ, Phil Nielsen