

Mission Statements

Christian Education Mission Statement

The purpose of the Christian Education ministry is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. We do this by providing multigenerational opportunities through study, fellowship and service – for individuals to explore their faith, to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures, and to demonstrate the fullness of Christian love.

Children's Ministry Mission Statement

Children are one of the greatest gifts God has given us. They are placed in our hands to nurture so that they may grow to rejoice in God's love in their own way and time. We at St. Matthew UCC accept with joy the privilege and responsibility of partnering with parents to help their children grow in faith.

To ensure a safe environment for our children to grow and learn, we have adopted a Safe Church policy.

Sunday Morning Schedule

Noah's Nursery

Childcare is provided from 9:20 a.m. - 11:00 a.m. in Noah's Nursery, located in the Nazareth Neighborhood entryway.

Worship Service 9:30 a.m.

Preschool through fifth grade children begin in the worship service. During the service, they are called forward for a children's sermon given by either the Pastor or Children's Ministry Director. The children are then dismissed into Sunday school while the Pastor gives his sermon and finishes the service.

Sixth and seventh grade students, teachers and shepherds begin in the worship service and are dismissed after the sermon. Eighth grade students and on attend the entire worship service.

Nazareth Neighborhood

During the school year: Children's Worship/Music/Workshop Rotation is from 10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

During the Summer: Summer Sunday School children, preschool through fifth grade, meet for a group activity from 10:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

Preschool Through Fifth Grade Children

Once dismissed from the worship service children gather in Temple of Truth for Children's Worship. At the close of Children's Worship, the children and their shepherds rotate to classes.

Sixth and Seventh Grade Students

After the sermon, the sixth and seventh graders meet upstairs in the Youth Sunday School room, The Sixth and Seventh Tribe of Israel.

Adult Education

Adult Education classes are held in the parlor on Sunday mornings before or after the worship service. The dates and times are noted in the bulletin handout, the Voice newsletter, and the Happenings emails.

Sunday Mornings in Nazareth Neighborhood

Children's Worship: Children's Worship is a time for the children to gather as a group in the Temple of Truth to participate in prayer (Blessings and Bumpers), scripture reading, music, the children's sermon, announcements, and the Doxology.

The Children's Choir: The Children's Choir Director leads the Children's Choir during Children's Worship. The children sing songs related to the Workshop Rotation theme and perform the songs for the congregation during Worship services.

Each spring, the children perform a Children's Musical during the Sunday morning worship service.

Nazareth Neighborhood Workshop Rotation: St. Matthew UCC uses the Workshop Rotation format for Preschool through 5th grade Sunday School. Each four to six week unit focuses on a single subject such as, prayer, mission, a Bible story, a Bible verse, etc. Each age group goes to a different workshop each week during the rotation lesson where they learn the same lesson in different learning styles. The workshop teachers plan and teach the lessons throughout the year while shepherds accompany the children to their workshops.

Nazareth Neighborhood Workshop Rotation Rooms:

- **Joseph & Sons Carpentry Shop** – where all sorts of art projects materialize
- **Sonshine Square** – designed for drama, puppets and movie-making
- **Mary's Movie House** – a movie theater where children watch movies and eat popcorn
- **Temple of Truth** – games, story-telling, music, dance, etc.
- **Commandments.com** – a computer lab where the children play games, hear stories, and create projects
- **Hezekiah's Kitchen** – where culinary magic brings meaning to Bible stories

Youth on Sunday Morning

The Sixth and Seventh Tribe of Israel - Our sixth and seventh grade youth attend the worship service and remain there through the sermon. After the sermon, they are dismissed and meet upstairs where they share Bible and life lessons more geared to their interests. The program is discussion-based, and questions are encouraged. Scripture lessons are tied in with practical life applications and videos may be used to reinforce these concepts.

Eighth Grade Confirmation - Youth in eighth grade attend confirmation classes and activities throughout the school year. The youth meet regularly with their chosen adult mentor, either as a small group or one on one. They also meet with the pastor, as a large group, to go over what they have learned with their mentors and expand their understanding of Christianity and the denomination. The confirmation group also visits various places of worship of other denominations and religions, participates in service opportunities, and has fun with the St. Matthew UCC youth group. In late spring, the eighth graders are confirmed during the Sunday morning Worship Service where they confess their faith in Christ, promise obedience to God, and are received by the church into active membership.

Youth in the confirmation program remain in the Sunday morning Worship Service for the entire hour.

High School Students - High school students are encouraged to attend the Sunday morning Worship Service.

Yearly Classes & Activities

At St. Matthew UCC, the children are an important part of our church family. We are always looking for creative ways to bring the different age groups together and partner with parents in growing their children's faith in Christ. Here are just some of the activities we do throughout the year:

Vacation Bible School

Every summer a great transformation takes place at St. Matthew UCC. Our church has been turned into: a sea where pirates sail; a cowboy ranch with wagon trains, camp fires, and horses; a tropical island with palm trees, sea creatures and mermaids; a circus carnival with a circus tent, elephants and carnival games; and a jungle with monkeys, snakes and giraffes. Children from all over Wheaton and neighboring communities come to share in five days of fun at St. Matthew UCC. We have lively music, games, stories, drama, crafts, snacks, and more. During the five days, the children learn about God's love for them and the wonderful gift they have been given through Jesus Christ. We end our week with a family Ice Cream Social and sing-a-long. To run our VBS program, we use over 50 volunteers of all ages. Children return year after year to take part in the fun and soon after, they are the ones coming back to lead groups.

Rally Day

Each September, we kick off the Sunday School year with a fun activity. While the children are together having fun, parents go to the Rally Day fair where they learn about the many opportunities offered at St. Matthew UCC.

Fourth Grade Bibles

Each fall, our fourth graders are given a Bible during the worship service. A scripture verse is selected for each child and they recite their verse at that time. The children are encouraged to wear-out their Bible because a worn Bible is a loved Bible. Each Bible is beautifully inscribed with the child's name, the church name, and date received.

Birthday Party for Jesus

Our annual "Birthday Party for Jesus" is a time to put the distractions of the Christmas holiday aside and focus on the real meaning of Christmas. We celebrate Christ's birth with games, crafts, a Christmas carol sing-a-long, and, of course, birthday cake. This is a time for the children to learn that putting Christ in Christmas can be fun and meaningful.

Children's Mission Projects

The Sunday school children take part in two mission projects throughout the year, as well as a prayer mission at Christmas time. Through these mission projects, the children learn the joy of giving to others. We have made Easter baskets for seniors, crafts that we sold to purchase animals for a village in a third world country, clean up kits for flood victims, cards to send to soldiers, ornaments for a Christmas tree at Cosley Zoo that animals can eat in the winter, and dog treats and kennel blankets with proceeds going to a local animal shelter. We have also collected quarters to help feed children in Haiti, sent care packages to our college students and military men and woman, and raised money to send 95 t-shirts to a village in Honduras. The children brainstorm with the Children's Ministry Director to come up with ideas where the children can actively participate in ways that make a difference in the lives of others.

Our prayer mission is an annual opportunity for the children to pray for one person over the Christmas holiday. For the past five years we have been praying for men and woman serving in the military and for the families who live in combat areas. Each child chooses an ornament from the Sunday School Christmas tree with the name of a military man or woman. Along with praying for Peace on Earth, the children make a commitment to pray for that person for the entire Christmas season.

The children's Sunday School offering goes to support different needs throughout the year. Some of the ways the children have chosen to use their offering include, Thanksgiving dinners for families in Dupage County; a Bible for a young woman in Honduras who dreamed of owning her own Bible, and laundry money for families of Bridge Communities, a transitional housing ministry.

M&M (Moments Together and Memories Forever)

This is a wonderful ministry that creates friendships between children and adults at St. Matthew UCCC. Each fall, adults and children gather to draw the name of a child/adult partner who they will spend "Moments Together" to build "Memories Forever". For twelve months, the pairs will have an opportunity to establish a special friendship and bond with each other. Our M&M leader plans a number of group events where partners get together to share in an activity which is often mission related. Many warm smiles and happy faces have resulted from friendships that were enjoyed by adults and children who take part in this wonderful ministry. Mary Jane Schnack created the program to build bridges between the children and adults at St. Matthew UCC.

Children's Choir

Our talented Children's Choir Director leads the children in music during the Sunday morning Children's Worship. Throughout the year, the children sing in the Sunday morning worship service. The songs the children sing in church are related to the workshop rotation theme in Nazareth Neighborhood Sunday School.

Each year we have a Children's Musical production that is both meaningful and fun. All children are invited to participate in the production. The children become stars when they perform the production during the worship service.

The Intergenerational Ringers Hand Bell Choir includes both adults and children. They meet one evening during the week and perform every few weeks during the Worship Service.

Family of Faith Ministry

Every few weeks during the Sunday School year, parents join their children during Sunday school. During that time, families join in discussion and activities that help parents and children grow together in their relationship with each other and with God. As a church, we only have a limited time each week to influence kids in their faith journeys. Parents, on the other hand, have the home field advantage. Ministering to families is equipping parents for their God-given role in the home. We also take part in mission projects and fun events throughout the year.

Noah's Nursery

Child Care Ministry

The purpose of the nursery at St. Matthew United Church of Christ is to provide care in a safe and secure environment for the children of those involved in the church's ministry, programs, and activities. Christian development and outreach are also purposes of the nursery program because children begin to understand God's love by experiencing the love of caring adults. We have a nursery caregiver on staff who is joined each week by one of our rotating volunteers to play, talk, read, and sing with the children while keeping them safe, comforting them, and affirming their accomplishments.

Age Groups

The nursery provides care for children from newborn up to three years old. During special events at church when there is no Sunday School, children up to five years old may attend the nursery.

Nursery Staff

Each Sunday morning, from 9:30 am to 11:00 am, the nursery is under the direction of a nursery caregiver and rotating staff of adult and youth caregivers. If you would enjoy spending time with our littlest members, please give your name to our nursery caregiver or one of our nursery representatives on the Christian Education Committee.

Youth Ministry

We believe youth ministry is of three equal parts: education, service, and fun. Our education focuses on biblical knowledge, theological thought, moral development, and spiritual discipline.

Service is local and global. We serve our community through volunteering at PADS and SCARCE, cleaning up the Prairie Path, making Valentines for children patients at CDH, collecting canned food for the Souper Bowl of Caring, and wrapping birthday presents for underprivileged children through the Humanitarian Service Project. In addition, we fund-raise through different sales and hosting events such as the annual pancake breakfast and the Father's Day car wash. We also go on an annual Boundary Waters or mission trip. We serve globally by sponsoring a child through Compassion International, volunteering with Feed My Starving Children, and participating in Operation Christmas Child.

Fun activities throughout the year include, Sleep Out Saturday, Family Game Night, a bags tournament, a Christmas party, Enchanted Castle, Laser Quest, touch football, bike riding, archery, canoeing, Six Flags, a winter retreat, going to the pool, camping at Blackwell, bowling, lock-ins, and movie nights. Weekly crazies meetings often include lessons, discussions, making videos, games, crafts, worship led by the student band, videos, and food.

Confirmation

Confirmation is not graduation. It is an opportunity for a student to make a personal commitment to follow Christ. Throughout the confirmation year, students, usually in the 8th grade, will explore and study a curriculum with their sponsors, question their faith, and grow spiritually. They will also go on trips to see various worship traditions. The confirmation year ends with a formal Seder dinner, personal statements of faith written by the confirmands, and a special Confirmation service.

Adult Education

“Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” 2 Timothy 2:15

As Christians, we continue to learn and grow in our faith throughout our lifetimes as we mature in our relationship with Jesus Christ. At St. Matthew UCC, we have opportunities

to enrich our spiritual lives through study, discussion, prayer and fellowship. All are invited to attend and enter the conversation.

Adult Faith Enrichment Classes These classes meet Sunday mornings either before or after the service. We are fortunate to have leaders who plan and present interesting and involving studies on a variety of topics. The classes change every few weeks, so there is always a new subject to explore on the horizon. Topics include a range of social and justice issues, Bible study, family and marriage, current events and books, and missions.

Women's Evening Book Study (WEBS) This book study meets on Wednesdays at 7:30 pm at various members' homes. This group welcomes all the women of the congregation to attend and join the discussion. The length of the study varies with the chosen book. This setting offers an informal, conversational opportunity in which to exchange ideas and build friendships.

Week Day Bible Study This study is led by the senior pastor and meets during the days or evenings at different times of the year. Watch for upcoming studies in the Voice newsletters, the Happenings emails, and the Sunday morning bulletins.

Please consider attending these classes and choose to participate. There is a blessing waiting for you as you respond to God's call.

St. Matthew Libraries

Lazarus Library for Children, Parents, and Teachers: Lazarus library is located at the top of the stairs, in Nazareth Neighborhood and is a comfortable place to relax and read a book, or checkout a book to bring home. This library offers both fiction and nonfiction books for children of all ages. Children can find a wide variety of Christian themes covering both New and Old Testament Bible stories and a large number of books with good moral lessons. Lazarus Library also has a parent and teacher resource section. The parent resource section of the library offers books on parenting, marriage, and Christian values in the home. The teacher resource section includes books on teaching, crafts, games, stories, drama, and more. In addition to books, families can check out DVD movies to watch at home. There are a number of movies for all ages and the movies have been approved by a Christian family review site.

The Adult Library: This library is located in the Narthex, on the back wall. The reading area provides a comfortable place for members to relax and view the books before

checking them out. There is a large variety of both nonfiction and fiction books to choose from.

The Young Adult Book and DVD Library: This library is located below the Youth bulletin board, outside the church office. The material has been previewed by our Youth Director and the DVD Library has movie titles for both teens and adults.

Books and DVDs in all libraries can be checked out by filling out the card, located inside the book or DVD case and placing it in the basket provided.