



October 25, 2023

A Note from Nikki Buskirk

Dear Friends,

As many of you know, back in January I officially became a Godly Play trainer. I get to go to other churches and train people in how to do Godly Play, the Bible stories and materials we use in our Children's Ministry on Sunday mornings with kids age four through 6th grade. (<https://hilliardumc.org/grow/children/sunday-mornings/>)



I have loved every moment of it: meeting new people, talking about Godly Play, speaking the language of Godly Play, spreading the love for Godly Play, and helping to create spaces for children to explore their spirituality. It's all fun and exciting!

I find that that's not the only thing I talk about while I'm doing these trainings. Most times these churches have the same problem we had with how to meet the needs of the middle grade kids.

So I also get to talk about the wonderful group here at Hilliard United Methodist Church called the **Faith Finders**, kids in third grade through sixth grade who meet every Wednesday night at 6:30pm during the school year. They learn about the Bible, how to navigate it, what all the parts mean, how to read scripture, and how to look up scripture. They also form spaces for building lasting friendships, and they truly lean into what it means to love God, love yourself, and love your neighbors.

As a part of being a church where everyone's welcome to the table, during the months of January through April the kids do a series called Loving Your Neighbor. Each month they meet a neighbor, someone who is part of the community and also part of a minority group.

They first are educated about this person's community, and then they get to meet this person in an interview style setting. From there, the kids then work on an outreach project that helps that specific community.

Every year the children meet someone who is part of the LGBTQIA+ community. Last year's neighbor was Steven Dunn, a fellow United Methodist church member who came and talked to the children about his life, his trials, and how he finds love in the world, which can quite honestly be nasty toward him. After meeting him and knowing other kids and families that deal with similar harm, the Faith Finders came together and formed the perfect outreach project.

On July 22, 2023, with the help of Max Collier (our former seminary intern), Anthony Coy-Gonzales, Lori Hudson, and Alex Kennedy, the Faith Finders hosted the first ever Pride Story Hour, again with Steven. We had about 20 people attend, where they heard inclusive stories read by our United Methodist neighbor.



They had face painting, and they got to snack on popcorn and drinks. It was a great time all around. We even met a new family who talked about how excluded they have been feeling from the greater community and how happy they were to finally be able to come to a space where they could be their authentic selves as a family.



After hosting Pride Story Hour, the Faith Finders decided that they would like to do more for this event. This year for our Gobble and Squash fundraiser, we would like to raise money to buy inclusive books to share, so that not only will the kids get to hear a few stories at the next Pride Story Hour, but they also will receive an inclusive book for their family to take home.

We know that with the current political climate it's becoming harder to find books that talk about loving everyone no matter what, thus bumping many kids and their families out of circles and spaces. We want to make

sure that families have at least one book that shows them the love that we show here, books in which they can see themselves.

So, church family, it's that time. If you would like to Gobble and Squash a friend's yard (\$20 donation) or buy insurance so that your yard does *not* get Gobbled and Squashed (\$10 donation), reach out to me or go to our website (<https://hilliardumc.org/events/gobble-squash/>), where you can fill out a request form and make your donation online. The kids will place wooden turkeys and pumpkins in your friend's yard for 24 hours. Gobble and Squash officially opens this Sunday, October 29, and runs through November 11.



As always, thank you for being a welcoming community and for showing love in that no-matter-what kind of way.

Nikki



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