

Hyde Park COMMUNITY UMC

A large, open book is the central focus, with a lush green tree growing from its pages. The scene is set against a dramatic sunset sky with warm orange and yellow light. The book's pages are filled with text, and the tree's branches spread across the top of the book. The overall mood is peaceful and spiritual.

SPiritUAL  
AUTOBIOGRAPHY:

*Growing Together  
In Faith*

## *Series Focus:*

Sharing our stories of growing in faith is a way of getting to know each other, encouraging each other in our faith journey, and learning more about the lifelong journey of faith. Each week we will reflect on a certain stage of faith, consider a person from scripture who highlights that experience, and hear from leaders and congregation members who will share about their spiritual autobiography. We will grow together in faith as we share our faith stories.

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## *Mark 10:13-16*

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13 People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. 14 When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 15 Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." 16 And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

*August 7*

# FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Rev. Dr. Suzanne Allen



Many of us have our first experience of faith when we are very young. Through loving care from parents and other adults in our lives, as children, we begin to build a lived experience of trust, courage, hope, and love. For others, the experience comes at later times along our life's journey as we encounter someone who shares faithful, unconditional love with us. Faith begins to grow within us as we experience connections with those we love and trust.

When we begin the journey of faith, it is not a thought out rational set of ideas. It is a set of impressions that is gained from those we love and trust in our lives. We then learn more as we begin to practice the rituals of faith in community such as going to church with our family.

## *Questions:*

What was your earliest experience of faith?

How did your parents and other significant adults in your life influence your experience?

## *Matthew 12:1–14*

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1At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. 2When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, “Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.”

3He answered, “Haven’t you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? 4He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. 5Or haven’t you read in the Law that the priests on Sabbath duty in the temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are innocent? 6I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. 7If you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’ a you would not have condemned the innocent. 8For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

9Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, 10and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to bring charges against Jesus, they asked him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”

11He said to them, “If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? 12How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”

13Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. 14But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.

*August 14*

## FORMED BY COMMUNITY

Rev. Kate Smith



As our faith begins to grow, it expands beyond the authority of parents and trusted adults and begins to be shaped by others in the faith community such as teachers and friends. Faith is experienced through the stories that are told and the rituals that are practiced.

### *Questions:*

Who were the first people beyond your parents who welcomed you into faith and helped you experience faith through Bible stories and practices like prayer and worship?

How did you experience the community of faith during this time?

What story or faith practice meant the most to you?

*My Story—Your Story—Our Story*



*"Faith is not merely  
a journey for the feet,  
but it is a journey  
for the heart."*

A.W. Tozer

## *Mark 9:14-29*

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14When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. 15As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.

16“What are you arguing with them about?” he asked.

17A man in the crowd answered, “Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. 18Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.”

19“You unbelieving generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.”

20So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

21Jesus asked the boy’s father, “How long has he been like this?”

“From childhood,” he answered. 22“It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.”

23“‘If you can?’” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for one who believes.”

24Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”

25When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. “You deaf and mute spirit,” he said, “I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.”

26The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, “He’s dead.”

27But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

28After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?”

29He replied, “This kind can come out only by prayer. ”

*August 21*

## CLAIMING MY FAITH

Rev. Dr. Todd Anderson



As we continue to learn the stories and practice the rituals of our faith, we begin to make connections between them and weave them into a more cohesive narrative that relates to our values and morals. We begin to think about our faith in a more abstract way, seeing layers of meaning in the stories, practices, and symbols of our faith as well as being able to see things from the perspective of others.

At this point in our faith journey we claim our faith as our own instead of it just following what our family does. We trust the authority of the religious community, including both leaders and the influence of our peers.

### *Questions:*

When do you remember claiming your faith for yourself?

Who or what groups helped you with this?

## Genesis 32:22-32

22That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. 23After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. 24So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. 25When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. 26Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak."

But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

27The man asked him, "What is your name?"  
"Jacob," he answered.

28Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, e because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."

29Jacob said, "Please tell me your name."

But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.

30So Jacob called the place Peniel, f saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."

31The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, g and he was limping because of his hip. 32Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon.

*August 28*

## QUESTIONING ASSUMPTIONS

Rev. Dr. Suzanne Allen



There comes a time in our faith journey when we begin to question what we have learned and assumed about our faith tradition. We begin to examine more deeply and question the authority structure of our faith. As we grow to understand doubt as a part of faith, we begin to develop a greater maturity, rejecting some parts of our faith and affirming and expanding other parts of our faith. We begin to take greater ownership of our faith journey as we seek understanding and integration of faith and life. While we have many questions, we are eager to practice faith in hands on ways such as feeding those who are hungry and housing those without homes.

### *Questions:*

When do you remember asking questions about your faith and what you have been taught?

How has the faith community responded to your questions?

## *Hebrews 12:1-3*

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1Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

September 4

## DEEPENING FAITH IN COMMUNITY

Rev. Sadell Bradley



Our struggles and questions begin to give way to a more comfortable place of faith, a deep assurance. We find some answers and we also begin to accept that not all answers are easily found.

Rather than needing to know and understand everything, there is a renewed valuing of community. We are more open to understanding and learning from the faith experience and perspective of others.

This is a place of faith where we return to simplicity. James Fowler describes those who come to this experience of faith as those who have *"a special grace that makes them seem more lucid, more simple, and yet somehow more fully human than the rest of us."* John Wesley talks about it as *"being made perfect in love."*

### *Questions:*

What are you unlearning and relearning about your faith?

How are you experiencing God and the faith community in new ways?

Who do you look to as a role model and mentor for your faith?



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