

**PROJECT SERVE** *is an initiative designed to explore the question:*  
“**HOW DOES GOD WANT US TO REACH OUT AND SERVE THE NEEDS OF OUR COMMUNITY?**”

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During a series of five weekly meetings on Tuesday evenings from June 24 to July 22, members of Faith Church were invited to come together to, “prayerfully discern where the Spirit of God might be calling us to reach out and serve the needs of our community,” (quoted from Pastor Monica). As we reflected upon the input from presentations at Faith Church by a variety of community organizations during the past year, our discernment discussions were wide-ranging across needs related to hunger, literacy, homelessness, mental health, the elderly, low-income families and the environment. As the weeks progressed, we considered a few possibilities that would extend our reach in current programs, such as Out of the Cold, but we were looking for a major new effort to emerge that felt spiritually and pragmatically “right”.

It is so exciting to report that following these thoughtful and in-depth sharings, meeting attendees have come together around a potential program as envisioned by one of our children, Jordan Reed, called the “Backpack Program”, to help feed hungry families in our community.

Jordan, daughter of Cindy and Seann Reed, had been inspired by discussions in Faith’s Sunday School to inquire about establishing a Backpack Program at her school,

Park Forest Elementary. The program helps feed families in need during the weekends, when school breakfast and lunch programs are unavailable. Jordan’s legwork and research efforts led her school to agree to participate. Basically, the program involves filling backpacks with non-perishable foods and distributing them (usually done by teachers) on Fridays to the children of families who have opted to participate in the program. Jordan and her mother have spoken with several key persons in our school district and local food bank, and also with individuals who are already involved in an established Backpack Program in Altoona. In addition, Pastor Monica has seen such a program in action in Harrisburg.

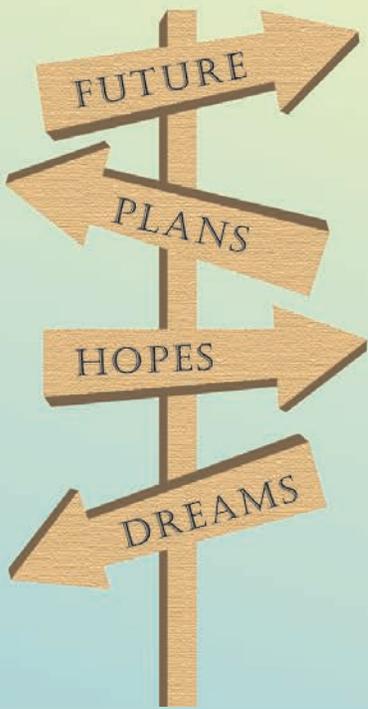
At our final two discernment sessions, Cindy Reed explained the program in more detail and the ground work she and Jordan were doing to initiate the program. It became clear as our sessions drew to a close that this program, envisioned to begin at this one school, is one that excited and motivated us. We all agreed that it was pragmatically possible given Faith’s resources, would meet a significant need in the community, would provide opportunities for people of all generations to participate in some way, and would fit in with Faith Church’s and the UCC’s social justice goals. We also would be partnering with the State College Area School District, community agencies, such as the

State College Food Bank, and perhaps with businesses in the community who may be willing to donate funds and/or materials, such as the backpacks.

A group of us present on July 24th, Virginia Biber, Maureen Dunham, and Jim Welsh, volunteered to work with Cindy and Jordan Reed to explore the potential for Faith formally adopting this program further. Anyone interested in helping with these efforts is welcome to join us. We plan to attend a Backpack Forum in Harrisburg on August 6th to learn about how these programs work. We heartily thank Pastor Monica for her skillful guidance, as well as Maureen and Bob Dunham, Jane Childs, and all those who helped in making this discernment effort a meaningful and community-building experience.

We are excited and inspired to explore this possibility!

~SUBMITTED BY  
VIRGINIA BIBER



may your love abound more and more  
in knowledge and depth of insight  
so that you may be able to discern  
what is best...  
PHILIPPIANS 1:9-10

# decisions DISCERNMENT

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