**Supporting Working Families Through Education**

When the coronavirus pandemic struck the United States in early 2020, nonessential businesses began shutting their doors, grocery stores started accumulating long lines and schools were forced to transition to virtual learning. For essential workers, having school-age children meant needing to be “essential” in two places at once: at home supporting e-learning and at work, serving anxious, frightened customers. First Presbyterian Church of Dallas, alongside the Day School it founded, saw the need, together. Since a person can only be in one place at a time, they would make a place — a safe place — in which their children could continue to learn, even during a global pandemic.

Looking to the congregation’s community ministry, which had adapted in order to safely provide meal services to those in need during the shutdown, the Day School brought a proposal to session to reopen the school for families of essential workers. Seeing both the need and the plan, the session approved.

Staff proceeded deliberately and efficiently, putting new, detailed practices into place. A hygienic, safe environment that would nurture students and educators alike was the hope of all involved. Staff members were allowed to opt-out if they did not feel safe returning to work, without having to use paid time off. The school also coordinated with volunteer counselors who provided six months of support for any member of the staff.

Church operations director Ashlee Hueston shared, "The pandemic helped people recognize the essential service that is child care and helped the church recognize the school as ministry.”

This recognition continued with the congregation’s participation in the Pentecost Offering. Congregations retain 40% of the churchwide Offering to support ministries with children, youth and young adults. Returned tuition dollars during the initial closure left a shortfall in revenue for the school, threatening this retooled ministry. The congregation of First Presbyterian quickly stepped up, contributing their portion of the 2020 Pentecost Offering to the Day School, as well as additional funds. Since First Presbyterian is also a Matthew 25 church, joining the movement within the PC(USA) toward building congregational vitality, dismantling structural racism and eradicating systemic poverty, they took additional steps to grow, not simply sustain, this ministry. After reopening, First Presbyterian’s Day School received the Texas Rising Starcertification, allowing for tuition supplements to be used for lower-income students, expanding access to the educational offerings of the school.

First Presbyterian’s commitment to supporting young people and working families is just one example of how congregations can live out the call to be a Matthew 25 church. The Pentecost Offering is helping them engage in their particular part of that vision locally, as well as joining with other Presbyterians to make an impact on children, youth and young adults in churches and communities around the country. This church-wide offering supports children at risk, ministries with youth and Young Adult Volunteers, and 40% of the offering stays right here to support [name and briefly describe how your session has decided to allocate the retained portion]. Please give generously, because when we all do a little, it adds up to a lot.

Prayer:

*God of all people,
stir in us a commitment to help shape the lives of our young people through education and faith formation.*

*As we teach and mentor, help us to hear, listen and learn from those whom we are teaching and every person we might encounter.*

*Amen.*