

August 25, 2020

Six Assembly Mennonite children had not met in person for their special Children and Worship Sunday school class since early March when COVID-19 turned the world upside down. These five and six-year-olds were more than half way through a year where their classroom became a place of worship, after the model of Young Children and Worship described by Sonja Stewart and Jerome Berryman in a book with that title.

In keeping with that tradition and as a way to bring these six children together again one last time before a new school year, they were invited, along with a parent, to gather outside at Pathways Retreat on August 15 to walk its Chartres-patterned labyrinth in the grassy meadow just north of the retreat house. Assembly member and Children and Worship storyteller, Sandy Fribley, talked with them about how a labyrinth is different from a maze and how walking a labyrinth is a way to talk with God while moving. The children also were given coloring pages with two different patterns of finger labyrinths and directions on how such a labyrinth can help to calm one's strong emotions, like anger and anxiety. As each child-parent pair took turns walking the labyrinth, others sat in the shade and colored their finger labyrinth.

“The children seemed to know naturally how to walk the labyrinth with awareness, as they stopped to notice wildflowers, touch a feather, or to feel the rock at the center. They also were aware of the surprises and sometimes the feelings of impatience that come with almost being at the center and then suddenly the path takes you further from it,” said Sandy. “This was such a good way for these children to be together safely in person, with masks on, and bring this past Sunday school year to a close in a way that meshed well with the tone of this particular class. I’m so thankful for Pathways Retreat as a resource, not just for adults but for young children as well.”