As we read the Bible we discover that hospitality is not just “niceness” or “neighborliness,” but crucial. Famine-stricken Israel found hospitality (food and welcome) in Egypt. Later, in the dark wilderness, Israel experienced the bright light of God’s hospitality: manna, quail, water from a rock. When Jesus sent 70 disciples out to announce and demonstrate the coming of God’s kingdom, he ordered them to travel light: “Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals…” (Luke 10:4) In this way they would be dependent upon the hospitality of others, and would invite them to enter into the generous, open-hearted hospitality that characterizes God’s rule. They were sent not just to talk about God’s coming rule; they offered people an experience of the kingdom of God, of generous gift giving and receiving.

In 2014 Faith Lutheran Church in Reno received a request. The high school youth group from Trinity Lutheran Church, Enumclaw, WA, was hoping to come to Reno for a summer mission trip and needed a place to sleep and prepare and eat meals. Faith is a small congregation, averaging about 50 at worship each week. But Pastor Tom Beck regularly reminded them not to focus on the things their size prevented them from doing, but to remain alert to the opportunities that might, despite their size, come their way. That message resonated with Sonja Dresbach, a church leader gifted with open-hearted hospitality. She offered to be the person who would meet the group when they arrived, orient them to Faith’s more-than-adequate rooms and kitchen, and check in with them during their stay. So Faith agreed to provide the needed hospitality.

Deacon Tammy Rismiller, an ELCA rostered minister of Word and Service, has been working with faith formation of children and youth at Trinity, Enumclaw, since 1996. Now married and a mother of three teens (two sons and one daughter), Tammy loves her work and has worked with six pastors at Trinity. Trinity is not a large congregation, either, averaging about 130 at worship each week, but 20-30 high school youth show up each Sunday evening for youth group. They come from Trinity Church, from other
congregations in that small town, and some are unchurched. There are ten trained peer leaders. Four small groups, led by adults, meet during the week. Most of all, Tammy reports, “The kids love service!” So the highlight each year is the summer mission trip, often facilitated by Youth Works. In recent years the group has served in New Orleans (working with people with disabilities), Lame Deer, MT (a Cheyenne reservation), Nicaragua (a medical mission trip), Appalachia, and, of course, Reno, where the youth work with Reno/Sparks Gospel Mission, a Christian residential substance abuse treatment program, a Boys and Girls Club, a community food bank, and a homeless shelter. These trips provide a rich experience of different kinds of people in a wide variety of settings. Most importantly, Tammy says, “After the mission trips many youth report a new, deepened relationship with God.” Two Lutheran pastors, a LCMS pastor in Sacramento, CA, and the pastor at another ELCA church in Enumclaw, are graduates of Trinity’s youth group and mission trips.

Having enjoyed and appreciated Faith’s hospitality in 2014, the group returned this summer, July 7-13, for another mission trip to Reno and sojourn at Faith Lutheran. This year’s group consisted of 32 youth, 10 adults (cooks, drivers, and more), and 6 college students who had been high schoolers on the trip to Reno four years ago. But this year there were two new kinds of service in addition to the previous trip’s. The group from Enumclaw worshiped with Faith on Sunday morning, providing a skit and doubling the size of the congregation, and spent Monday at Faith painting, doing yard clean-up, and helping with other tasks Faith’s older members are unable to do. Just like Jesus intended! The kingdom of God came near as hospitality led to gratitude, and gratitude led to reciprocal service.

Faith Lutheran Church, Reno, which doesn’t have the gifts to create and sustain a vibrant, life-changing youth ministry, discovered it does have the gifts to support and participate in such a ministry.

Alert to opportunities!
Generous hospitality!
The Spirit works in amazing ways!

### Supper Church

**Does your congregation do "Supper Church," or other meal-based worship? We want to hear more about it! Please contact Trudy Franzen or Carl Wilfrid at** [mic@spselca.org](mailto:mic@spselca.org) **and tell us all about it!**

Do you have a story that you would like to share? Send any Church Together story requests to [mic@spselca.org](mailto:mic@spselca.org).