



South-Central Synod of Wisconsin

A Faithful Innovation Story

The 2024 Faithful Innovation cohort will be forming soon! An email full of information about the process went out in late December - [click here](#) for the details.

Below, see a quick story about a ministry that blossomed out of the work of Faithful Innovation.

St. Mark's Lutheran in Madison hosts a free monthly cookout in the summer months that feeds around 90 people from the surrounding neighborhoods. It all started, however, with a few people sitting outside in lawn chairs. Part of the Faithful Innovation process invites congregations to attempt ministry experiments. After noticing where God is present in the community, the congregation or ministry tries something new, usually something small, to see what God can do with it. Something like a few friendly people in lawn chairs outside a church, next to a playground, ready to make conversation or just offer a friendly welcoming smile.



It took some time, but eventually people from the neighborhood would stop for conversation, learning that these friendly people were there just to be neighborly - nothing transactional, not even a push to attend worship. The experiment took a pause during the first year of the pandemic, but resumed in 2021 with "fire pit nights" which in July, August, and September of that year morphed into the first cookouts. Average attendance was around 30 people, ranging from people without shelter to neighborhood homeowners.

The cookouts returned in 2022 and attendance increased to 60, most of whom were from the neighborhood and not members of St. Mark's. Guest "celebrity chefs" and speakers were added, including the local alderman and other civic and community leaders. Now community was being formed, trust was being built, and hungry people were being fed both physically and spiritually.

The cookouts have continued to grow, in part thanks to support from other congregations in the South-Central Synod (we are truly in this work together!) as well as grant funding.

Pastor Lisa Nelson has noted that this little experiment - just hanging out outside their church building on summer evenings - has discovered and is now meeting the need for community. She notes too that not all who come are hungry for just the food - this regular, consistent ministry provides a space for fellowship and companionship, a sense of belonging.

And that, truly is what Faithful Innovation can help us do - **pay attention to the needs of the community around us and listen for how the Spirit is calling us to meet them** - in big ways and in small ways, but always in faithful ways.