

## Educator retires after 42 years with church preschool

News Tribune · 8 Jul 2024 · A1 · By Ryan Pivoney rpivoney@newstribune.com

After 42 years directing the preschool at First Presbyterian Church, Marilyn Hofmann took stock.



“Some of the kids that I had, now I have their kids. And it’s threatening the next generation,” she said with a laugh. “I thought maybe it was time to put out a new face. Two generations for sure, and maybe a third’s getting close, you know, it’s time to let somebody else in.”

First Presbyterian Church celebrated Hofmann and her retirement from the preschool director position Sunday. Hofmann’s last day in the role was July 1.

“It’s just been such a privilege to be able to work with the kids, work with the parents, work with all the amazing, amazing teachers over all the years,” she said.

Hofmann, a former Lincoln University professor, said the teachers who surrounded her during the past four decades made the job easy.

Laurie Koestner, a teacher for the past five years, is taking over as the church’s preschool director. She taught in the Cole RI School District for nearly 20 years.

“She was one of my students at Lincoln way back when,” Hofmann said, adding the preschool program is in good hands.

Hofmann said she’s not leaving the congregation and plans to volunteer where she can.

“I need my kid-fix,” she said.

Nobody knows how many children Hofmann has influenced during the past 42 years but Natalie Mendez, Christian education director for the church, took a crack at trying to estimate.

Given an average of 50 students per year, Mendez said Hofmann “would have helped to bring 2,100 children closer to God.”

“And I’m sure that’s a low number,” Mendez said.

Hofmann became preschool director in 1982, when — as Mendez noted during Sunday’s service — E.T. was the highest grossing movie at the box office and Late Night with David Letterman debuted on television.

Hofmann held Mendez’s role for about 35 years before duties were reallocated across positions. Responsibilities were split up so Hofmann’s eventual retirement wouldn’t be a disrupt-

tion.

Mendez said she's worked closely with Hofmann during the past few years.

"Probably my favorite thing in working with her is just working with children — she just loves children," Mendez said. "She's brilliant."

Mendez described Hofmann's influence on the church's youth as "incredible."

Hofmann is known around the congregation for her kindness, acceptance and comfort, Mendez said. And she's helped instill those values in younger generations.

"That's one of the things about being a teacher: you never know where your influence ends," Mendez said. "All those personality-type things were instilled in the children, and then they grew up to do those kinds of things, and then their children."

Carla and Steve Ahrens have attended First Presbyterian Church for the past 39 years. Hofmann helped shape the faith of their four daughters, Carla Ahrens said.

"She will be missed dearly," Carla Ahrens said. "She has brought so much joy to these children, and they, in turn, have brought joy to her."

Carla Ahrens said her children didn't attend preschool at the church but went on youth group trips with Hofmann.

"All our children have been drawn closer to God by Marilyn," she said.

"Kids are my thing," Hofmann said. "I've been absolutely blessed and I literally thank God everyday that I've gotten to do jobs that weren't jobs. They were just joys."