

WELCOMING FAMILIES AROUND THE TABLES:

**The Family Church Has Entered Their Building and Is Getting Ready To Charter
By Pastor Paola Benecchi**

On Sunday March 15, The Family Church of Neenah-Menasha worshiped for the first time in its own building located on 2318 American Drive in the town of Menasha.

It has been a long journey to this point.

It all began in November 2000 when a group of members of First United Methodist Church in Neenah, led by Pastor Gordon Lind and Deacon Amber Wolover, formed a dream team to create a new church. This visionary team started working in January 2001 with a plan to create a new faith community that would include entire families in worship and would empower parents to be the spiritual leaders of their children. Part of that vision was to have families worshipping together around tables in an informal environment, and an interactive service that would serve the entire family with lively music, puppets, skits, and even healthy snacks throughout the entire worship.

The Family Church held its first worship service in September 2002 in the cafeteria of a middle school of Menasha. Ten families from First UMC were part of the launch team. Eventually the majority of those families who were part of the launch team went back to First UMC as The Family Church started welcoming many new families. In the meantime, I, Pastor Paola Benecchi, came to The Family Church and brought my experiences in new church starts to the faith community.

In March 2007, The Family Church moved into the fellowship hall of a Lutheran church near the school, relieving the overwhelming work of unloading and loading the trailer, as well as setting up and tearing down tables, the stage, the sound system and bins of supplies each week. After moving into the new place, The Family Church gained energy and a momentum in a ministry that allowed the community to start working toward the dream of a building that would be a home for worship, outreach and new ministries. In the May 2008, The Family Church purchased a building and started a renovation process.

The realization of this dream was made possible by the Wisconsin Conference of The United Methodist Church who has been walking this journey with The Family Church. If not for their incredible trust and powerful support, it would never have happened. The Conference Board for Congregational Development gave The Family Church a loan for the purchase and renovation, the conference trustees signed all the papers, and the financial office supported The Family Church during every step of this process.

During the last year, The Family Church has been growing spiritually and in Christian commitment, becoming a community ready to create a faith legacy and reach out to new families. The core vision and worship style is still the same, but during the past few years more space has been created to meet the spiritual needs of parents, grandparents and the maturing children entering in their teenager years. The new worship center on American Drive provides a sacred space that brings new opportunities and enriches the worship experience for children and adults.

The Family Church will charter on Sunday, June 7, continuing the journey that was started six amazing years ago.

The new (and first ever) communion table in the sanctuary (built in memory of a mom of The Family Church) says: ***Let the Children Come to Me.*** Jesus' words truly come alive every Sunday as you enter The Family Church.