

Reimagining
church where
a child's faith
flourishes

2023 ANNUAL REPORT




**Center for Faith
and Children**
at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

Prepared for
Lilly Endowment Inc.


By Center for Faith and Children (CFC)
at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
(TEDS), the Divinity School of Trinity
International University

Introduction

“Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them. Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these’” (Matthew 19:13-14).



Two observations could be made about the attitude of parents and other adults in the cited verses above. People generally want quality lives and experiences for their children, such as bringing kids to Christ for prayer. Yet, adults sometimes see children as a disturbance or distraction to adult interactions, as demonstrated by the disciples’ rebuke of those who brought children to Christ. To be fair, children can sometimes be a distraction or disturbance but not always so, and we could say the same about adults too – we disturb and distract. Observably, nothing seems to have changed between the time of the cited episode and the current time. We see similar attitudes in parents and other adults in the desire for quality lives for kids and sometimes being dismissive of kids and their contributions.



By insisting the children come to him, Christ communicated to the adults around him that children belong in God’s kingdom. It should be noted that the cited episode was preceded by Christ placing a child amid his disciples to teach them to have a child-like attitude toward God’s kingdom (Matthew 18:1-5). Christ’s radical and disequilibrating teaching about the place of children in God’s kingdom and the urgent implications that come with it inspired the founding of the Center for Faith and Children (CFC) at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (TEDS), the seminary of Trinity International University (TIU). CFC is a decade-long vision nursed by Dr. Mimi Larson, who has considerable practical and research experience in children’s spirituality and faith formation.

CFC exists because of a generous grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. through its Nurturing Children Through Worship and Prayer Initiative. This annual program report for the year ending December 31, 2023, is prepared for Lilly Endowment. The report highlights CFC’s focus and purpose, grant activities and their fruits in the reported year, some reflections on what we’ve learned, progress with our performance indicators and outcomes, and the next steps for the following year.

Project Purpose

Our program aims to establish a center to support local churches and parents as they nurture children's faith. We share a warm and stubborn belief in God's love for children – and in the possibility of a children's ministry equipped and empowered to reflect this love. We desire to reimagine church where a child's faith flourishes. Our vision is to empower churches by supporting them and their congregations with resources and partnerships. We are inspired to equip ministry leaders by coming alongside them with educational opportunities, research, community, and fresh ideas. We also desire to encourage parents as they nurture their child's faith, developing and providing resources and community.

TEDS strives to serve the local church, and educating, equipping, and empowering the local church is at the forefront of the seminary's strategic plan. This project strengthens the seminary's commitment to the local church and enables us to focus specifically on children who are often undervalued within the church.



Grant Activities

ACTIVITIES

Lilly Endowment provided TIU with an initial exploratory grant (October 1, 2022 – October 31, 2023) followed by an implementation grant currently active for five years starting March 1, 2023. This section of the report will highlight the activities of each of the two grants. We should note that the two grants overlapped and were seamless in transition as the implementation phase built on the exploratory phase.

Initial Phase Grant: An Exploration of the Needs Regarding Children’s Faith Formation Program (Grant Number: 2022 1396)

Our proposal for the initial phase of the grant was to engage strategic, collaborative partnerships with congregations, ministry organizations, and other researchers in the field to understand better the current needs of children, families, and congregations to inform the establishment of a center at TEDS devoted to continued activities related to children’s faith formation. We proposed three main approaches to the exploratory process, as follows:

1. Listen to crucial constituents regarding children in the church, including pastors, children’s ministry leaders, and parents.
2. Observe how congregations creatively engage children in worship arts and intergenerational ministry.
3. Consult with experts and leaders in the field to discuss children’s faith formation and how an academic institution might lead and shape the conversation of children’s faith formation on a broader scale.

Once the initial phase proposal was approved and the grant awarded by Lilly Endowment, we set out to do just as proposed. Below is a summary of our activities based on the three categories of our exploratory process.



Listening Sessions

We recruited three PhD (Educational Studies) students at TEDS to work with Dr. Mimi Larson toward conducting listening sessions with pastors, ministry leaders, parents, and seminary students. We spoke with **30 local church pastors**, identifying their needs in ministry with children and personal needs for spiritual formation within the pastor's family. We specifically asked questions regarding engaging children in worship and what helps or hinders those efforts. Initially, we expected to just focus on their work in the church. But we adapted our questions to include a focus on pastors' families, an insight we got earlier in a conversation with a retired pastor.

We recognize that pastors are gatekeepers to church and models for church families. If we can impact and help a pastor's family in the spiritual formation of their children, we expect that this will trickle down and potentially impact the congregation. Being situated in a seminary, we have started exploring this connection with pastor's families on campus through our plan for periodic campus-wide talks on relevant topics related to children's faith formation and partnership with TEDS' library to provide ministry resources and children's storybooks that help equip ministry leaders in both the profession of children's ministry but also how they can nurture their own children's faith through story and activities.

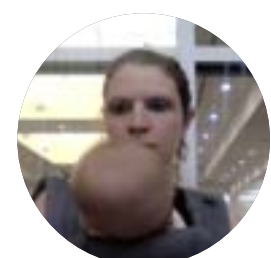
Our conversation with pastors informed us, among other things, that pastors value the children in their churches, often feel unprepared to translate that value into action, frequently have to act as interpreters between the generations, and are hungry for collaboration. Also, we were able to establish relationships with these pastors. Several of them have asked for consultation and continued conversations to improve the work with their congregations and children's ministry.

We also conversed with **parents and children's ministry** leaders to understand their experiences in nurturing a child's faith. We heard the real practical needs of parents and saw the divide between the local church and the home. These insights have shaped the development and content of our podcast and inform the future development of cohorts as we help churches engage with parents and formation within the home. We also listened to **seminary students**, assessing their understanding of ministry with children. That has been beneficial as we explore how to engage the campus community academically and how we can support their faith formation efforts within the home.

We also conversed with parents and children's ministry leaders to understand their experiences in nurturing a child's faith.



CFC staff debriefed with some of the doctoral students who worked with Dr. Larson to conduct listening sessions. Top row: Dr. Mimi Larson (CFC's Executive Director), Dr. Ahyuwani Akanet (CFC's Managing Director), and Paula Chang (PhD student and CFC Intern). Bottom row: Brittany Trafton (PhD student and CFC research assistant), Meredith Brower (PhD student and CFC research assistant), and Lindsey Goetz (CFC's Resource Director)



Observing Congregations

Our engagement with local churches during the listening sessions allowed us to visit and observe several congregations and how they engage children in worship. This experience expanded our vision of what vibrant and effective engagement of children in worship could look like and will directly impact our second season of the podcast, which will focus specifically on children and worship.

Consulting with Experts in the Field

We also spoke with experts and leaders in the field to discuss children's faith formation and how an academic institution might lead and shape the conversation on children's faith formation on a broader scale. These conversations included experts **John Roberto** (author, teacher, and founder of Lifelong Faith) and **David Csinos** (author and Associate Professor of Practical Theology at Atlantic School of Theology), as well as academic institutions such as **Yale Youth Ministry Institute** and **The Institute for Youth Ministry at Princeton Seminary**.

From our conversations with experts, we gathered significant insights into the needs of congregations and parents, the tension between academics and practitioners in the field, and the need to support more research on children's spirituality. These conversations have shaped our work, including producing "The Child in our Midst" podcast for parents, embracing a foundational value that our work is to bridge theory and practice, and pursuing a partnership with the Children's Spirituality Summit.

Our conversations with Yale Youth Ministry Institute and The Institute for Youth Ministry at Princeton Seminary became two of the most valuable as we established the Center for Faith and Children. Their excellent advice and encouragement on the practical nature of this work, including budgeting, marketing, and relationships with key leaders at the institution, has proven to be strategic as we navigate the establishment of the Center.

Phase Two Grant: Center for Faith and Children Program – Year 1, 2023 (Grant Number: 2023 0215)

Lilly Endowment approved TIU's proposal to establish the Center for Faith and Children (CFC) within the school's seminary, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (TEDS). The grant was approved to begin March 1, 2023, for the next five years from that time. We proposed that CFC will serve three primary audiences: 1) equip ministry leaders through educational opportunities, research, and vision; 2) empower the local church with training, assistance, and imagination; and 3) encourage parents by developing and curating resources, tips, and inspiration.

The first year of the grant has been a building year for establishing a solid foundation upon which to build. Here are some key activities from the first year. Since the grant started in March 2023, some activities scheduled for the first year spilled into 2024. This report will highlight the early stages of planning for those activities and report about their implementation as part of the 2024 fiscal year report.

Personnel

Dr. Mimi Larson was named the Executive Director of CFC. CFC has since hired staff to work with Dr. Larson as follows.

Managing Director

Ahyuwani Akanet was hired as the center's Managing Director. He holds a Postgraduate Certificate in Theological Education from the London School of Theology and a PhD in Educational Studies from TEDS. With his rich academic background in educational studies, years of experience working with children and families in church contexts, and grant management experience, Ahyuwani was a clear choice to direct the center's day-to-day operations and facilitate collaboration among the CFC staff and the larger TEDS community.

Resource Director

Lindsey Goetz has been hired as the CFC's Resource Director. Lindsey is a current student in the MA program in Educational Ministries and a Trinity College alumnus. She has spent the last decade working as a children's minister in various churches and co-authored The Gospel Story Hymnal. Lindsey's understanding of practical ministry, children's spirituality, and creativity make her ideal to coordinate the center's resources and projects. Lindsey is excited about creating an online presence for thoughtful children's ministry leaders and collaborating with the CFC team to develop resources to equip the church for intentional ministry with children.

Research Fellows

CFC recruited two Research Fellows instead of one as initially proposed. We expanded this portion of our project because one of the fellows came to us after we hired the first fellow, with research in the area that supports children and worship. She is part of a denomination that has not embraced this methodology, and we wanted to encourage her work with hopes that this will influence a new group of churches to engage children in worship.

The two research fellows are Joseph Seo and Alair August. Joseph Seo has a PhD from TEDS. His dissertation focused on children's faith formation in immigrant families and parents' influence on their children. Alair August has earned an EdD at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Her research is on the Montessori approach to children's spirituality and its implications for Christian educators. Both fellows are working on research papers they will present during the Children's Spirituality Summit (CSS) in May 2024, which the CFC, in partnership with CSS, will be hosting on the TEDS campus.

Intern and Office Assistant

The Center is also excited to provide an internship for Paula Chang, a current doctoral student at TEDS. Along with learning about academic centers, Paula will work with the team to develop resources to serve children's ministry leaders and parents. Reviah Kim, Dr. Larson's Graduate Assistant, will also serve as an office assistant to CFC.



The CFC Team – left to right: Linsey Goetz (Resource Director), Dr. Ahyuwani Akanet (Managing Director), Reviah Kim (Office Assistant), Dr. Mimi Larson (Executive Director), Paula Chang (Intern), Dr. Joseph Seo (Research Fellow), and missing is Dr. Alair August (Research Fellow)

Office Space and Equipment

TEDS provided CFC with two office rooms beside Dr. Larson's office, which she had been using as a faculty member. The Executive Director and Managing Director use two adjacent offices. Our Resource Director and Office Assistant share the third office, a few doors from the Executive Director's office. The current space setup is temporary as we continue to converse with the TEDS administration to find a more collaborative space that will have the center's personnel in the same space while accommodating critical resources we could show and demonstrate to our partners.

Also, we purchased laptop computers for the Executive Director (out of the initial phase grant), Managing Director, and Resource Director (out of the CFC program grant). Our offices were already outfitted with furniture. We got some relevant books for our shelves and some office supplies. The school's IT department provided us with an office phone line and individual lines for the center's three directors. We also purchased two USB mics for virtual podcast recording. TEDS has a studio for in-person recording that we have access to.



CFC staff with Useful Group staff

Branding, Website, and Marketing Materials

CFC hired an outside agency, Useful Group, to provide the center branding and website development services. The Useful Group met with CFC's Executive Director, Managing Director, and Resource Director to gather information and understand the center's DNA. During that meeting, we explored ideas from previous research and practical experiences about the needs or concerns of parents, pastors, and children's ministry leaders. It was a fruitful meeting that has informed our branding and website development. We also work with Useful Group to create print materials for advertisement and donor relations.



CFC staff with generated info on the background

The center has worked with the Useful Group to create its logo and tagline. We have made significant progress in developing the website and hope that the final website will be ready in March or April 2024. Our website will be a hub of resources, including our podcast, articles, toolkits, blogs, curriculum reviews, and media, among others. We have also partnered with the TIU Marketing and Communications department to create a landing page, which we have been using to collect email addresses of people interested in our work. At the time of this report's writing, we collected over 90 email addresses from the landing page. A recent Google search report indicated our landing page reached 30 clicks in 28 days.

The TEDS Marketing and Communications department has also worked with us to produce printed materials that highlight some of our educational programs, like the MA in Educational Ministries and the Certificate in Children and Family Ministry. We have also created social media handles across platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and Pinterest.



CFC's logo



CFC's tagline put as a sticker

Podcast

CFC's podcast is titled "The Child in Our Midst" and reflects a high view of children and the implications of that for churches and homes. Our primary audience will be parents. We plan to host interview-like conversations exploring various topics around children's faith formation with scholars and practitioners in the field as guests. Each season will have 6-8 episodes. In the fall of 2023, we began podcast strategy and consultation with a podcast expert, Richard Clark, from Area Code Audio. Our consultant asked us questions that helped us define our podcast focus and the strategy for reaching our podcast goals. Towards the end of 2023, we recorded our first episode of the first season of our podcast, with Dr. Mimi Larson serving as our first guest to help our audience understand the center's work. Our Resource Director and Executive Director serve as the hosts of the podcast. We are working toward recording the other episodes and beginning to release them in March of 2024.



"The Child in Our Midst" podcast logo



Recording the first episode of "The Child in Our Midst" podcast on Nov. 13, 2023: Second picture from left to right – Lindsey (co-host), Mimi (Guest), and Ahyuwani (co-host)

TEDS Talk

We included in our proposal the plan for yearly TEDS talks to subversively engage the students who are studying to be pastors and theologians in a way that engages their areas of study with our concern for children in the church. In the fall of 2023, we partnered with the TEDS chapel committee and secured a date (February 6, 2024) to host one of the institution's campus-wide chapel gatherings. We invited Dr. Emily McGowin, a Wheaton College theology professor, to serve as our guest speaker. We titled the event "Let the Children Come" (Matthew 18:1-10). Planning for this event was in full swing in November and December of 2023. We also planned to host a free lunch conversation for the TEDS community where Dr. McGowin, Dr. Larson, and another TEDS professor would serve as panelists. We also planned to unveil our recommended books display section in the TEDS library, where relevant books we would vet and recommend would be displayed for the TEDS community and their families to access. Although the center has been operational since the grant was approved, we will use this chapel event as our official launch event to formally introduce the TEDS community to our program. We will fully report the implementation of this TEDS talk in next year's program report.

Events with Partners

Evangelical Council for Abuse Prevention (ECAP)

CFC's emphasis on a high view of children bears implications for ensuring safe spaces for children to flourish in their faith practices and development. Because of this, CFC partnered with the Evangelical Council for Abuse Prevention to provide training for children's ministry leaders in local churches around Illinois and Wisconsin. The event was hosted on the TEDS campus on September 14, 2023, with 25 children ministers in attendance. ECAP's Executive Director, Jeff Dalrymple, and General Counsel, Sally Wagenmaker, were presenters during the event. The training provided the participants with the legalities involved in handling child abuse cases and training on how to prepare volunteers for safeguarding against child abuse. Lunch was provided for the participants as they engaged the presenters in discussions. We have added the participants' contact information from this event to our mailing list and have continued sending them updates from CFC.



ECAP training session | From left to right: Jeff Dalrymple, Sally R. Wagenmaker, Ahyuwani Akanet, and Lindsey Goetz

EFCA Children's and Family Ministry Leaders Gathering

CFC participated in the November 13-14, 2023, EFCA's (Evangelical Free Church of America – TIU's affiliated denomination) Children's and Family Ministry Leaders Gathering. The gathering brought together 45 children and family ministry leaders from Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana, Texas, California, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Hampshire, Iowa, South Dakota, and Colorado. CFC's Executive Director, Resource Director, and Managing Director were in attendance throughout the gathering. Our Executive Director and Resource Director led a presentation and conversation session. They led a collaborative reflection with the participants around the needs of children's ministry and provided helpful tools for engaging those needs and challenges. We have added the participants' contact information from this event to our mailing list and have continued sending them updates on CFC's activities.



Mimi and Lindsey leading a session during the EFCA event



Mimi, Lindsey, and Ahyuwani



LEADERS, SCHOLARS, AND PARTNERS

CFC's Leadership

As part of the center's activities, we reported in the previous section of this document that the center assembled the personnel necessary for running its various activities. CFC is led by Dr. Mimi Larson, the Executive Director, under the oversight of the TEDS Dean's office, led by Dr. David Pao, the TEDS Dean. Dr. Ahyuwani Akanet serves as CFC's Managing Director, while Lindsey Goetz is the center's Resource Director. Mimi, Ahyuwani, and Lindsey make the core leaders of the center, who meet regularly to discuss the progress of and plan CFC's activities. The center also has two research fellows, Drs. Alair August and Joseph Seo, who continue to ask questions and study topics on children's ministry, the fruit of which we will share with practitioners through our website, journal publications, and conference workshops. Our intern, Paula Chang, and office assistant, Reviah Kim, help with various office and events projects.

Learning as a Team

As a team, CFC's leaders continue to learn about the needs of local churches and families concerning children's faith development and seek tools and resources to speak to those needs. As we continue to interact with local churches, we continue to grow in understanding cultural and denominational differences and how those backgrounds matter in implementing children's ministry ideas. Our interaction with local church pastors during the first phase of our project and children's ministry leaders during our fall 2023 events has broadened our understanding to realize that as we provide practical tools for children's ministry, there is the need for inviting practitioners and parents toward a deeper biblical and theological understanding of children and their place within the faith community.

We also are growing in collaboration with our team and with TED's institutional departments that we interact with, such as Advancement, Marketing and Communication, Admissions, the Dean's Office, TEDS Library, and Student Life, among others. As we regularly get requests from inside and outside TEDS about partnerships, we are also learning to develop tools to help us carefully consider those requests to know which are strategic and helpful partnerships to form relationships with. We constantly remind ourselves and ask how any partnership aligns with and helps advance our mission, vision, and core values.

CFC's leaders continue to learn about the needs of local churches and families.



Emerging Leadership and Partnerships

CFC has developed strategic partnerships that would help advance the mission and vision of the center. For instance, along with being asked to consult with churches, several pastors from our pastoral interviews in phase 1 have returned to engage us in conversations with them and their staff. Our discussions with them identified needs within their congregations that they would like to reimagine. We have partnered with the Children's Spirituality Summit, a Christ-centered and ecumenical organization of scholars and thoughtful practitioners, and will host the next summit in May 2024. We are exploring partnerships with other Lilly Endowment grants at TEDS, like the Pathways and Mosaic Youth Initiative.



CFC has developed strategic partnerships that would help advance the mission and vision of the center.

As mentioned, we have established a strong partnership with the EFCA Children's and Family Ministry Leaders and ECAP. We will also attend the Children's Pastors Conference (CPC), a national event for the global children's ministry community, in January 2024 to introduce our work to the attendees and lead workshops (Dr. Larson will be leading two seminars). We also explored partnerships with Intergenerate and INCM – International Network of Children's Ministry. Christian schools like North Star Classical Christian School have contacted us for partnerships. Other Lilly Endowment grant recipients outside of TEDS, including Eugene Roehlkepartain (Igniting Spiritual Thriving with African American, Latino/Hispanic, and Low-Income Families project) and the Christian Reformed Church in North America (Christian Parenting Initiative), have invited Dr. Larson to collaborate in their work. Our Executive

Director – Dr. Larson, Managing Director – Dr. Akanet, Intern – Paula Chang, and Office Assistant – Reviah Kim, also attended the 2024 Society of Professors in Christian Ministry – SPCM (formerly SPCE) that took place in Chicago. We learned from the plenaries and also got the opportunity to share some of our upcoming events.

In terms of scholarship, we are seeing both master-level and doctoral-level students express interest in the work of the CFC and contribute to the field of children's spirituality. We also see theological and practical ministry education scholars engage the center in conversations. We have also maintained relational interactions with advisors/scholars, including John Roberto, founder and president of Lifelong Faith Associates, Dr. Shirley Morgenthaler, Distinguished Professor of Teaching, Learning & Diversity at Concordia University–Chicago, and Dr. Holly Allen, retired Professor of Christian Ministries and Family Science at Lipscomb University. We should note that our original grant proposal did not address the area of advisors. This year, most of our interaction with advisors has been informal. While we have not budgeted for an advisory board, this is one of the areas that we are wondering about and if this is something we need to create soon or plan for later.



COMMUNICATION

Existing and New Networks

Networking has proven to be a very viable option for communication. Since existing bodies like EFCA, ECAP, CSS, CPC, etc., have built a base of participants, we have access to their participants through our partnership with those bodies. We have added over 200 new addresses to our email list through our partnerships with existing and new networks. We also got a vast email and mailing list from TIU Advancement and Marketing and Communications to target local, regional, or national audiences. To share our findings and communicate avenues for engaging with CFC, we have utilized emailing services and mailing postcards to reach our audience.

Speaking Engagements

The CFC staff gets opportunities to share the center's work through speaking engagements. For example, our Executive Director, Dr. Larson, was invited to speak on Carson Weitnauer's Uncommon Pursuit podcast, presented along with our Resource Director, Lindsey Goetz, at the EFCA Children's and Family Ministry Leaders event, and will be leading two workshops in January 2024 at the CPC. Those are avenues to share our work, research findings, and upcoming events.

Print, Electronic, and Social Media

We have developed handouts and distributed them to participants during some of our presentations at the various events we have attended. E-articles have also been a part of our communication methodology. We have written several articles about the center for publication on TEDS articles boards. We make social media posts on Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, and X (formerly Twitter) to promote our events or share ideas. Also, we are working on the first season of our podcast, which will be released in March 2024. Our website will serve a primary function for sharing our findings and resources.

TEDS On-Campus Presence

As hinted earlier in this report, we partnered with the TEDS chapel committee and will host a campus-wide chapel gathering in the 2024 spring semester. That gathering will mark our official introduction of the center to the community. We plan on having those TEDS talks every year to share our work and opportunities with the TEDS community. We also utilized TEDS newsletter services to communicate with the TEDS community.

Impact

SCRATCHING WHERE IT ITCHES

Our conversations with pastors, parents, and children ministry workers gave us insight and sometimes confirmations about CFC's activities. As one of the respondents said of the needs in children's ministry, "More resources for teaching parents how to pass on the faith, resources how to do family worship at home, resources to encourage parents." Yet another respondent added during those conversations, "Thank you for doing this. Let ministers and pastors know that there are people caring for them and willing to help. It is a huge encouragement." We have had similar expressions after some of the events we hosted or partnered to facilitate. As we continue with our implementation in the coming year and the years following, we hope to see the benefits of our work being manifested in us and our partners. We are developing and curating resources and tools for various aspects of children's ministry.

GROWING INTEREST IN TRAINING

During our session at the EFCA Children's and Family Ministry Leaders event last November, a participant got up during the discussion time and said they have been considering for some time the possibility of seeking further training in the field of children's ministry and was deeply convicted of doing so during our presentation. She said she shared this to inspire others who might join her. We have had a practitioner join our Certificate in Children and Family Ministry program at TEDS in the fall of 2023 following conversations with our Executive Director, Dr. Larson. Two applicants are on track to begin the program in the spring semester of 2024. As we share our tools and resources, we also point to training opportunities for children's ministry leaders. In the upcoming years of this grant, we plan to host more training and webinars to address this need.



NEW PROGRAMS AT TEDS

TEDS has had an MA in Educational Ministries for some time. We recently added the Certificate in Children and Family Ministry. Both programs could be completed online, providing the flexibility some children's ministry leaders need. We will be planning cohort programs in the coming year. We are still considering the format to use, whether to have participants come to Trinity for a brief time and then complete the other activities of the program remotely or for us to carry the cohort programs to different regions across the country.

REACHING FAMILIES ON CAMPUS

We have received inquiries from families on the TEDS campus about material recommendations for faith practices at home. As mentioned earlier in this report, it is our hope that by resourcing current seminary students and their families, we will impact not just them but the churches they will go and serve in. We will unveil our display in the TEDS library, which will hold books, toolkits, and other resources we have carefully reviewed for families to access. We are also in conversation with the library to host monthly gospel storytelling sessions for families on campus. We will report fully about these next year.



Reflection

LESSONS WE LEARNED AND COULD SHARE WITH OTHERS

There's a deeper hunger for conversations about children's ministry. Although we had some awareness of the need for conversations in the children's ministry sphere, we did not know the extent of that hunger. As we began interacting with the various stakeholders in the children's ministry arena, we learned of a deeper hunger, especially from pastors and children's ministry leaders. The people we interacted with shared their experiences, including the needs, challenges, and ideas on the way forward.

We can only do some things. Our conversations with stakeholders and the inquiries we continue to receive have quickly reminded us that we cannot do everything. We have identified several areas of concern, some at the heart of our work. Yet, we see more that needs to be done but cannot accommodate, at least for now. We have learned to always prioritize what we invest our resources in based on the center's mission and vision. Sometimes, we have recommended people to other organizations or departments within TEDS that could help.

Strategic partnerships are critical. We anticipated that partnerships would be pivotal to our work and have quickly learned that that is the case. In our foundational and building year, we have enjoyed partnering with the Useful Group, our marketing and branding agency. They have been incredibly helpful in interpreting our work and values and conveying them clearly and appealingly to our audiences. Our work has also been supported by partnerships with some TEDS departments and organizations outside of TEDS, like ECAP, EFCA, and CSS.

CHALLENGES AND IMPLICATIONS

There are so many needs. As mentioned earlier, we get many inquiries about potential partnerships for events or research. We have been careful in staying the course according to the scope of our work. Yet, we recognize the need to pay attention to those needs that come our way. In other words, at this point, we are leaving out different things that are also important and should be attended to. This means that we are paying attention to how our work might need to change, looking for creative ways to help meet these needs, as well as identifying other avenues for people to investigate and use.

We are realizing things we need that we did not account for in our proposal. Now that implementation is in full swing, and we are halfway through our building year, we continue to see needed details in our work that we did not or could not see when we wrote our proposal. For example, we have realized that we need to account for having experts in the podcast field to help us establish the content of our podcast, at least for the first season. We have seen great value in engaging a consultant to support us with our podcast details, but that has meant shifting funds around to accommodate that. We also see some of those shifts in other aspects, like building our website. Those new details remind us to be more adaptive and accommodating to where the facts of implementation lead.

Being flexible and patient. We have made significant progress and met most of our deadlines for activities in the first year. Yet, because of some unexpected changes, there are other goals we have yet to meet, but we are not far off. For example, our website is still under development, and because it is hosting most of the other elements of our resourcing, we are waiting for the website to be active so that we can complete our resourcing goals. In the meantime, we have to adjust some portions of our timeline; hopefully, things will align as quickly as the website is up. We continue to plan ahead, working on the other resources, like podcast and articles, which will go on the website once it is up and running.

STRENGTHENING OUR WORK

More emphasis on parenting. When we developed our proposal for the center, we focused on the first two strategies of our proposal – to empower churches and equip ministry leaders. As we have entered into this work, we realize that there is a great need for the third strategy of the proposal – to encourage and resource parents. We are working on accommodating the parenting piece the best we can. Our podcast is primarily targeted toward parents (and children ministry leaders). We wonder how to expand and deepen our work with parents and if we will be able to do that in this initiative or seek other ways to accommodate this.

Youth and young adult pieces. We continue to ask ourselves what it means to be part of the lifelong faith experience. Children’s ministry should not just end after kids “cease” to be children. Instead, continuity is needed, and the youth and young adult pieces are critical to that. The Mosaic ministry of TEDS has done some work with young adults and is now working with youth. We are exploring how our work could bleed into Mosaic’s work, assisting, supporting, and enhancing their efforts so that children continue to experience the support they need for their faith to flourish.

Cross-cultural education/awareness. The TEDS community is blessed with rich cultural diversity, and our students come from diverse backgrounds around the world. As we explore ways of engaging families on campus, there is a need for cross-cultural education and awareness both for us and for the community. As we curate resources, what cultural implications and nuances might inform that process? How can we encourage cross-cultural awareness here on campus and throughout our larger work, strategically looking at the place of children in different cultures and how to better work with them? That would be very strategic for the TEDS community and immigrant congregations throughout the United States.

Progress Toward Performance Indicators and Outcomes



CFC Outcomes and Performance Indicators

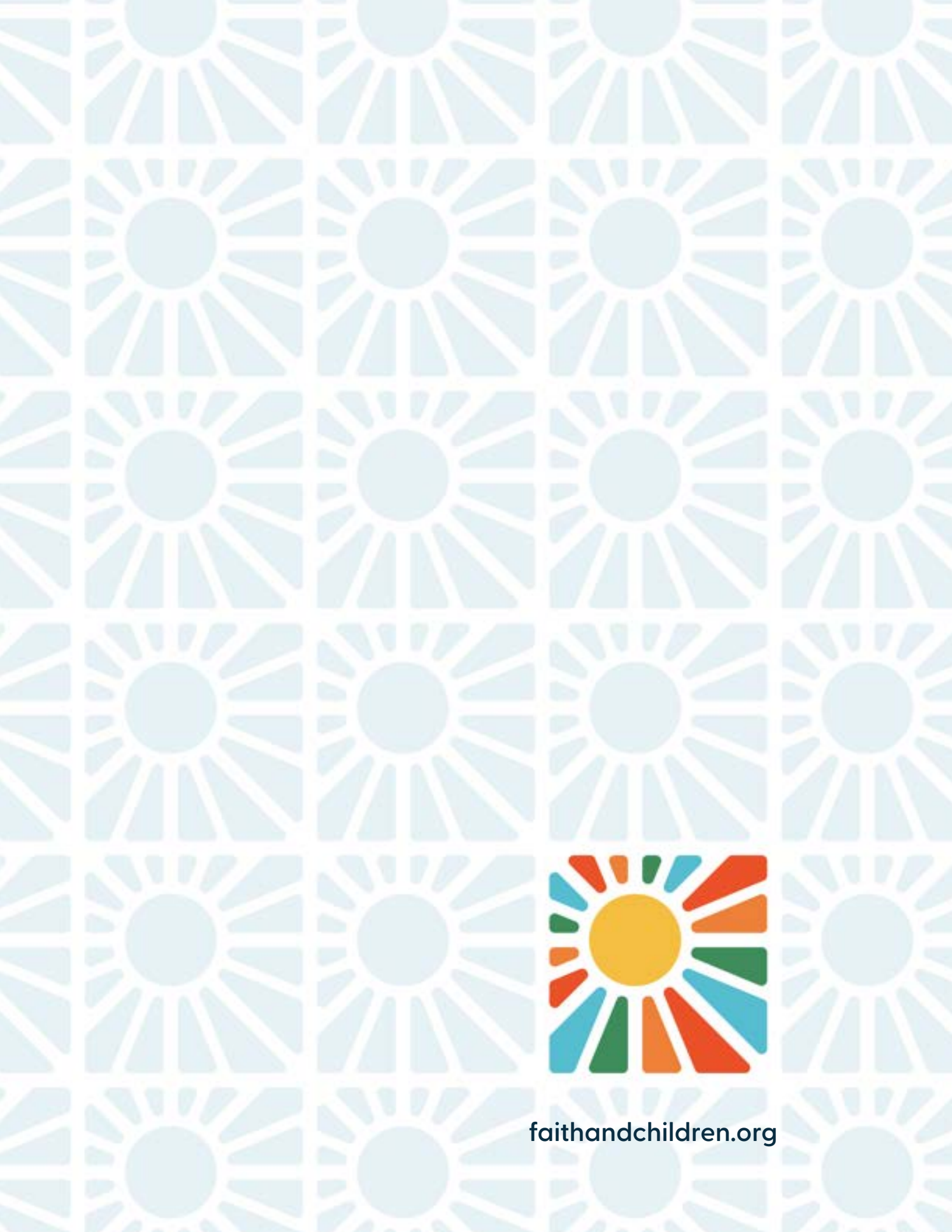
	Year 1: 2023 - Projections	Progress
Personnel	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hire Key staff, including Managing Director & Project Director 2. Select Research Fellow 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Completed 2. Completed
Office Space & Equipment	Acquire and outfit office space with appropriate equipment and supplies	Started - Final Stages
Activities		
Website	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Website development 2. Marketing materials created and printed 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Started - Final Stages 2. Started - Final Stages
Podcast	1st Season of Podcast: create at least 6-8 episodes season on general children's faith formation	Started - Final Stages
TEDS Talks	Host a TEDS talks conversation on campus once per year	Started - Final Stages
Conference	Planning for next year (2024)	Started - Initial Stages
Cohorts	Scheduled for 2025 (planning begins in 2024)	Not Started
Research	Research Fellow selected	Completed
Develop Supportive Partnerships	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create/print donor materials 2. Strategic meetings with Advancement 3. Establish a connection with EFCA 4. Begin donor relationships 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Started - Initial Stages 2. Started & Ongoing 3. Started & Ongoing 4. Not started
Evaluations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conduct Yearly Evaluation Activities: 2. Measure website traffic (KPI 1.1) 3. 12 Blog articles written (KPI 1.2) 4. User experience (UX) survey (KPI 1.3) 5. Count the number of episodes created (KPI 2.1) 6. Measure number of downloads (KPI 2.2) 7. Survey to collect listener feedback (KPI 2.3) 8. Measure number of attendees (KPI 3.1) 9. Evaluation Activities: Follow-up survey (KPI 3.2, 3.3, 3.4) 10. Formulate any necessary reports for Lilly Endowment 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Not Started - Waiting for website 2. Started & Ongoing - Working on 8 instead of 12 to coordinate with the 8 podcast episodes 3. Not Started - Waiting for website 4. Started & Ongoing - Working on 8 episodes for first season 5. Not Started - Waiting for website 6. Not Started - Waiting for website 7. Completed - We had 70 total attendees at two events 8. Not Started - Will do after the conference in May 2024. 9. Completed

Next Steps

CFC is on course to complete the remainder of its grant activities for the first year as the overflow into the second year (2024). We plan on following our proposed plan for 2024. Here are some of the continuing and new activities for the next year of our grant.

- 1. Children's Pastors Conference (CPC):** We have registered to attend the 2024 CPC conference in Orlando, Florida. We look forward to connecting with other children's ministry leaders to learn what they do and share what we do. The conference is scheduled for January 8-11, 2024. Dr. Larson has been invited to present at this conference.
- 2. TEDS chapel launch event and library display unveil:** CFC has secured February 6, 2024, to host a campus-wide chapel service followed by lunch conversation sponsored by the center. That is one of our yearly TEDS talks to engage seminary students regarding children in the church. We have been promoting this event in various communication avenues on our campus. We will also unveil our book display in the library to display collections of books and toolkits we recommend.
- 3. Website going live:** We are thrilled about our website coming to life in 2024. It is scheduled to go live in March of 2024. We have various KPIs related to our website included in our proposal, and we will evaluate the website's functionality.
- 4. Podcast:** We have started to record episodes of our podcast, "The Child in Our Midst." We will begin the first season release on our website in March 2024.

- 5. Children's Spirituality Summit (CSS):** We scheduled a conference as part of our activities for 2024 and are delighted to partner with the Children's Spirituality Summit to host their 2024 conference. The summit is scheduled for May 21-23, 2024. CFC is hosting the conference on the TEDS campus. We have been collaborating with CSS staff toward planning and implementing the event.
- 6. Articles and other publications:** Our research fellows and other staff have several articles in the works. We will publish some articles in early spring, our blog posts will go on our website sometime in March 2024, and our research fellows will present their research during the CSS conference in May 2024 and seek publication afterward.
- 7. Planning for Cohorts:** We will begin our cohort program in 2025. So, we will start planning in the spring of 2024 with a brainstorming session on the structure and content. We will continue to plan throughout 2024 and into the implementation year 2025.
- 8. Storytimes for families on the TEDS campus:** We will partner with the TEDS library to begin monthly storytimes for families and their children. The goal of this project is not only to provide spiritual care for the children on campus but also to expose seminary students and families to sound methodology for nurturing children's faith. We plan to begin sometime in the summer or fall of 2024. Our staff and other seasoned practitioners in the children's ministry field will facilitate those storytelling sessions.
- 9. Print materials – brochure, donor, and others:** Conversations are underway with the marketing agency we work with to produce print materials like brochures, donor materials, conference handouts, and banners, among others. Most of these materials are scheduled to be produced by spring 2024.
- 10. Evaluation and sustainability:** We have plans to evaluate and receive feedback from our partners who access or use our resources or participate in our events. For instance, we will use evaluation questionnaires at the end of the May conference and continue tracking the traffic and activities on our website. We will also continue our internal evaluation of events to inform how we improve next time. We continue to gather data about concerns in children's ministry. For example, we conducted live surveys with the participants during the EFCA Children's and Family Ministry Leaders Gathering and gathered more insights. For sustainability, we will begin donor relations to share our work and vision, inviting potential donors to partner. We also plan to have a store page for some of our merchandise on our website. Some of our resources, like consultation, include a fee that would count as revenue. Also, in the next school year, the Executive Director and Managing Director plan to take a course on fundraising principles and practices to help us obtain stronger sustainability.



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