



# Nurturing Children Through Worship & Prayer Initiative

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

2024

**L**illy Endowment is pleased to announce its *Nurturing Children Through Worship and Prayer Initiative (Nurturing Children)*. The aim of this initiative is to help children come to know and love God and grow in faith.

In this open and competitive initiative, eligible charitable organizations in the United States may submit proposals for **up to \$1.25 million** that may be used for **up to a five-year period** to establish new and/or enhance existing programs that support congregations as they design intergenerational corporate worship services and prayer practices that more intentionally and fully engage children and nurture their faith. The Endowment is especially interested in supporting programs that help congregations address one or more of the following objectives:

- Strengthening worship and prayer practices that attend to and respect how children experience God and express their faith.
- Enhancing worship and prayer practices that are more fully inclusive of all children, including children with disabilities.
- Drawing more fully on the arts (e.g., music, visual arts, drama, etc.) to enhance the experience of worship and prayer for children.
- Creating opportunities for Bible storytelling that help children hear and tell stories of faith through worship and prayer practices.
- Enhancing worship and prayer practices that more intentionally connect worship with the daily lives of children and their families.

The Endowment anticipates awarding **approximately 60 grants** to charitable organizations that submit the most compelling proposals and demonstrate the capacity to design, implement and sustain a high-quality program that advances the initiative's aim.

**Interest Form:** Interested charitable organizations are encouraged to complete and submit the online Interest Form and a one-page Letter of Interest **by Monday, March 4, 2024**, through the *Nurturing Children* webpage on the Endowment's website. Submission of the form and letter, however, is not a requirement for submitting a proposal.

**Proposals:** Proposals must be submitted **by 5 p.m. (ET) on Monday, May 6, 2024**, through the Application Form on the *Nurturing Children* webpage on the Endowment's website.

The Endowment anticipates announcing grant awards in the fall of 2024.

The rationale, eligibility and selection criteria, proposal guidelines and proposal submission instructions are discussed more fully below.

## Rationale

### The role of worship and prayer in nurturing faith of children

*Nurturing Children* is based on the recognition that worship and prayer are centerpieces of Christian life and play critical roles in the formation of a child's faith and relationship with God. Through worship and prayer, Christian faith is nurtured and sustained by regular remembrance and celebration of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and ongoing encounters with God. Although Christians gather in various settings and engage in wide-ranging practices that are grounded in diverse theological traditions, common Christian worship practices include the reading of scripture, prayers of the people, preaching, observance of sacramental practices, congregational singing, confessions of sins, and the offering of blessings. In worship children are surrounded by and contribute to the sounds, cadences, vibrations and contours of the whole assembly. Through communal prayer practices, children hear and participate in the community's expressions of gratitude for God's blessings and petitions to ask for God's healing for those who grieve and suffer. Most importantly, Christian worship and prayer are filled with practices that help Christians of all ages place their own lives within the larger narrative of God's love for all, blending contemplative moments of reflection with hymns of praise and the celebration of sacraments with prophetic calls to live with hope and to share God's love through acts of healing and service.

Recent research reinforces the idea that Christian faith is caught as much as taught. Studies of early childhood development emphasize that children learn from formal (e.g., classrooms) and informal environments (e.g., breakfast tables) alike. In her book, *Little Steps Big Faith*, for example, Dawn Rundman explains how corporate worship expresses the depth of Christian faith with a kind of emotion and rhythm that cannot be replicated outside of the worshipping community. Furthermore, intergenerational worshipping communities, which include children, teenagers, young adults, mid-life adults and older adults, provide children with a place in which they can feel secure, known and loved. In this manner, Rundman and other researchers note that corporate worship and prayer are exceptionally enriching settings that nurture the religious lives of children as they grow in Christian faith.

Although many churches teach Bible stories and engage children in prayer outside of worship in age-segregated activities (such as Sunday schools), researchers and religious leaders today are acknowledging that intergenerational corporate worship and prayer offer one of the most important settings for children to acquire the language of faith, engage Bible stories, learn their faith traditions, form strong attachments with people who care for them and grow in faith. Through worship and prayer, children are formed as disciples of Jesus. Moreover, children have incredible capacity to worship and pray themselves. When children worship and pray, they practice Christian faith and participate in the movements of the wider community around them, giving praise, offering lament, confessing shortcomings and lifting up petitions for others.

At the same time, religious leaders and educators also recognize that the presence and participation of children enhance the worship and prayer of the wider congregation. Many leaders and educators draw upon Jesus' words in Mark to remind congregational members about the importance of including children in congregational worship and prayer: "Whoever welcomes one of these children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me isn't actually welcoming me but rather the one who sent me" (Mark 9:36-37 CEB). Amid his teaching, Jesus saw a child, reached out and embraced him to make the point that participation in Christian community is for all ages. Later in Mark's Gospel when people were bringing their children to Jesus so that he would bless them, the disciples tried to stop them. Jesus grew angry and reminded the disciples that the kingdom of God belongs to children (Mark 10:13-16). With these words, religious leaders

and educators note that Jesus inverted the conventional wisdom to remind the disciples that the presence and participation of children are critical to the entire faith community. Moreover, Jesus also reminded the community that faith is not only passed down from adults to children, but also passes from children to adults.

### **Prompting creative responses to a guiding question**

*Nurturing Children* invites Christian congregations, as well as other faith-based organizations, to explore the following guiding question: **How might congregations enhance their efforts to nurture faith in children by giving greater attention to the inclusion of children in their worship services and prayer practices, attending especially to corporate settings that engage children in the language, movement and sound of worship and prayer in sensory-rich ways?**

In prompting congregations to respond to this question, the Endowment encourages interested organizations to design programs that draw on the wisdom of their theological traditions and are appropriate for their religious constituencies and ministry contexts. Although the Endowment recognizes the broad array of theological perspectives and commitments held by Christian communities and seeks to provide funding to organizations that support congregations serving diverse communities, the Endowment anticipates that most proposed programs that receive funding under this initiative will share two common characteristics: first, they will prompt congregations to consider how their worship and prayer practices both welcome and nurture the natural curiosity of children to ask questions about God and the world around them as they seek to discover their faith and come to know and love God; and second, they will lead congregations to explore and enhance the sensory dimensions of their worship and prayer practices, especially how the sights, sounds and movements of worship and prayer are experienced and draw children, as well as other worshippers, toward God.

The Endowment hopes interested organizations will encourage congregations to design a variety of corporate worship services and prayer practices that more intentionally and fully engage children and nurture their faith. For example, congregations might consider, among other things:

- Creating activities and resources to help children follow and engage more fully in corporate worship practices.
- Using visual arts and other displays that depict biblical stories to enhance worship spaces and/or providing more opportunities for children to engage in praise and prayer in worship through movement and play.
- Designing more opportunities for children to contribute to worship by serving as worship assistants, singing in children's choirs or other expressions of the arts, or offering prayer requests to include in the congregation's prayers.
- Attending to the presence and participation of children in worship by connecting worship elements to the daily lives of children, incorporating visuals or examples from children's lives into sermon illustrations, singing songs and hymns with repetition, or blessing children through rituals to mark significant events and milestones in their lives.

Through *Nurturing Children*, the Endowment intends to support an array of programs that support congregations serving communities in diverse ministry contexts. Interested organizations are encouraged to consider carefully how to support the congregations they serve and design a program that aligns with the organization's resources, expertise and experiences. Although this list is for illustrative purposes only, the

Endowment anticipates that many organizations that receive funding under this initiative will submit requests to design and launch programs that engage in one or more of the following activities:

- Helping congregations assess ways that they currently involve children in corporate worship services and prayer practices and supporting efforts to design and test innovative practices to engage children more intentionally.
- Creating cohorts of congregational teams to learn from one another as they design more intentional corporate worship services and prayer practices to engage children and nurture their faith.
- Inviting congregational leaders to develop collaborations with and learn from organizations that have expertise in engaging children with disabilities.
- Connecting congregations with local artists and arts organizations with expertise in engaging children.
- Creating resources in different media for congregations to connect worship more intentionally to the daily life rhythms of children and their families to inspire love of and service with their neighbors (e.g., printed pamphlets, digital downloads, websites or “how to” videos).
- Creating cohorts of ministry professionals and congregational volunteer leaders who meet over time to share resources and provide support for one another as they explore ways to engage children more fully in congregational worship and prayer.
- Providing professional development opportunities focused on nurturing children through worship and prayer for pastors, children’s ministry professionals, congregational volunteer leaders and others.
- Providing coaching and consultations for ministry professionals as they seek ways to incorporate into their ministries what they learned about ministry with children and families during the pandemic.

## Eligibility and Selection Criteria

Interested charitable organizations with Internal Revenue Code section 501(c)(3) and public charity status that are committed to supporting Christian congregations are eligible to participate in *Nurturing Children*. Eligible organizations may submit proposals of **up to \$1.25 million** each that may be used for up to a five-year period.

The Endowment intends to award grants to organizations that submit the most compelling proposals and demonstrate that they have the capacity to design, implement and sustain a high-quality program that advances the initiative’s aim. Funding decisions will take into consideration the following criteria, among others:

1. The clarity of the proposed program’s purpose.
2. The quality of design of the proposed program and its potential to advance the initiative’s aim.
3. The capacity, readiness and appropriateness of the organization to develop the proposed program.
4. The reach of the program and its potential positive impact on significant numbers of children, congregations, ministry professionals and/or congregational volunteer leaders.
5. The level of commitment and capacity of the organization to garner the financial resources needed to sustain its program beyond the grant period.

The Endowment encourages interested organizations to apply for an amount appropriate to the needs of the proposed program and to their capacity and ability to sustain the program beyond the end of the grant period. Organizations that receive *Nurturing Children* grant awards should have no expectation that additional Endowment funding will be available to sustain their program after the grant period ends.

## Proposal Guidelines

A complete proposal must include the following information.

**Official Request Letter:** The letter must be signed by the organization's chief executive officer and specify the amount requested from the Endowment for the proposed program.

**Information Form:** This form provides key information about the proposal and identifies information about the individuals responsible for the proposed program.

**Executive Summary:** The Executive Summary should not exceed one-page in length and describe the organization, its mission and constituencies, the purpose of the proposed program, highlights of key activities and anticipated outcomes. The Endowment recommends that organizations prepare the Executive Summary after completing the Proposal Narrative.

**Summary Budget:** The Summary Budget of the proposed program's budget should condense into one-page budget line items from the detailed Line-Item Budget. The Summary Budget should be prepared after completing the Line-Item Budget (see below).

**Proposal Narrative:** This narrative should address the items below and **not exceed 12 pages** in length, excluding the Executive Summary, Summary Budget, Line-Item Budget and other supporting materials.

1. **Organizational profile and capacity:** The organization should provide a brief description of its mission and constituencies, number of people or organizations served annually, organizational structure (a profile of the board and how board members are recruited), denominational affiliation (if affiliated) or theological tradition, how it relates to and supports Christian congregations, annual operating budget for 2024 and major sources of revenue for its current operating budget.
2. **Purpose and Rationale:** The organization should include a short narrative that describes the purpose of the proposed program, why the organization is interested in developing the proposed program and chronicles the organization's decision to apply for this grant.
  - › What does the organization seek to achieve through the proposed program? How will it advance the aim and objectives of *Nurturing Children* described above on page 1?
  - › How does the proposed program draw on the organization's theological and ecclesial understanding of childhood and the organization's commitment to faith formation? How does the program reflect the organization's understanding about children's capacities to worship and pray? How does the program respond to the initiative's guiding question stated on page 3 about the importance of congregational worship and prayer practices in nurturing faith in children?
  - › Who was involved in designing the proposed program? How did the organization listen to children, parents and caregivers, pastors, children and youth ministry professionals, congregational leaders and other advisors and scholars in preparing its proposal?
3. **Program Design and Activities:** The organization should describe the design of the proposed program in detail.
  - › What is the program's overall design, and what are its key activities?

- › How will the activities add up to a coherent and effective strategy that will help children come to know God and grow in faith?
- › Who are key leaders for the proposed program? What roles and responsibilities will they have in implementing the effort?

**4. Collaborations and Partnerships:** The organization should provide a list of current or anticipated collaborations and partnerships that will help the organization as it implements the proposed program.

- › With whom will the organization collaborate (e.g., denominational judicatories, ecclesial networks, nonprofits and other ministry organizations that support children, families, congregations or ministry professionals)? Are these existing or new relationships?
- › What roles will collaborators or partners play?
- › How will the organization manage these relationships?

**5. Outcomes and Evaluation:** The narrative should describe the program’s intended outcomes and how the organization will measure progress towards those outcomes.

- › Outcomes: The narrative should describe the desired outcomes the organization hopes to achieve through the proposed program. What change does the organization hope to see if the program is successful? What are the anticipated outcomes for children? For congregations? For families? For ministry professionals and congregational volunteer leaders who guide ministries for children? For others?
- › Performance Indicators: The narrative should describe the specific performance indicators that will be used to measure the proposed program’s progress toward the outcomes stated above. Organizations must include in their proposals a timetable for achieving these indicators.

Performance indicators should include quantitative and qualitative markers to gauge the program’s progress toward its outcomes. For example, one of the proposed program’s outcomes may be that at least 30 congregations develop worship practices that are more inclusive of children with disabilities. An accompanying performance indicator may be that at least six congregations develop these kinds of practices through the program each year during the five-year grant period. A second example of a program outcome may be that 70 percent of worship leaders participating in a two-year learning cohort will incorporate more music and visual arts that resonate with children into their congregations’ worship services. An accompanying performance indicator may be that at least 35 percent of participating worship leaders incorporate more music and visual arts after the first year and at least 70 percent after the second year. A third example of a program outcome may be that children engaged in worship in participating congregations demonstrate growth in faith. An accompanying performance indicator may be interviews with parents at specific intervals of the grant period about ways that their children are talking increasingly during the week about Bible stories and prayers or singing more often songs that they heard in worship.

- › Evaluation Plan: The narrative should provide a plan for how the organization will evaluate the proposed program? How will the organization track the program’s performance indicators? What qualitative and quantitative methods will the organization use in the evaluation process (e.g., interviews, focus groups, surveys)? Who is responsible for evaluation?



6. **Communication:** The organization should describe the plan to communicate about the program (with potential participants, general public, funders, collaborators, etc.) and the communication strategies it will employ.
7. **Sustainability:** The organization should describe its plans to continue the program beyond the end of the grant period.
  - › How does the organization intend to support financially the activities that have been successful?
  - › Who will cultivate new sources of funding to replace grant dollars and how will they secure these funds?
  - › How will other resources (e.g., intellectual capital, commitment of existing staff time, capacity building) be secured and deployed to sustain the momentum of the program into the future?

**Timetable:** The organization should provide a high-level timetable of the proposed program's key activities, including evaluation (i.e., when specific performance indicators will be assessed to track progress towards outcomes), communication and sustainability activities.

**Line-Item Budget and Budget Narrative:** The detailed Line-Item Budget should specify how the funds will be used for the activities described in the proposal narrative. The Budget Narrative should provide a short narrative detail for each line item included in the Line-Item Budget. The attached "Guide to Budget Preparation" provides required formats. The Endowment recommends working closely with those responsible for accounting procedures and financial policies in the organization to create a Line-Item Budget that aligns with those procedures and policies.

**Letters of Support (where applicable):** If the proposed program involves other collaborating organizations, letters of support from the leaders of the other organizations or agencies must be submitted with the proposal.

**Copy of Organization's Current Year Operating Budget:** The organization must include with the proposal a copy of the organization's operating budget for the current year.

**Copy of Organization's Audited Annual Financial Statements:** The proposal should include a copy of organization's most recently completed audited annual financial statements (completed by a certified public accounting firm). The financial statements should include a balance sheet, income and expense statement, and footnotes that provide an accurate assessment of the financial condition of the organization. Audited financial statements are preferred. If an organization does not have audited financial statements, the proposal should include a discussion about why these statements are not available and provide reviewed or internal annual financial statements for the most recently completed fiscal year that include a balance sheet and income and expense statement, along with footnotes, if footnotes are included.

**Exempt Status and Charity/Foundation Status Information Form:** This form is used to verify the organization's tax status as a qualified recipient of grants from private foundations such as Lilly Endowment. The organization must check a box in Section 2 of the form to reflect the organization's status. The organization's status may be located on an Internal Revenue Service exempt status determination letter, as indicated in Section 2 of the form and as described below.

**Copy of IRS Exempt Status Determination Letter:** Most public charities that are qualified recipients for grants from private foundations will have received a tax-exempt status determination letter from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). This letter provides verification of the organization's status as a 501(c)(3) organization and

indicates the part of the tax code under which the organization's public charity status has been established. Many denominationally related organizations may not have asked for or received such a letter from the IRS. If that is the case, the organization should determine whether it is listed in a group exemption ruling for the denomination. If so, the organization should attach evidence that it is covered by the ruling (for example, by sending copies of the directory cover and the page on which the organization is listed in the official directory of the denomination). No grants will be awarded until the proper tax status is confirmed.

## Proposal Submission Instructions and Checklist

Interested organizations are asked to use the following proposal submission procedures:

**Interest Form:** Submit the online Interest Form and one-page Letter of Interest on the [Endowment's website](#) by **Monday, March 4, 2024**, indicating its intent to submit a proposal. The submission of an Interest Form and Letter of Interest is not required, but it will inform the Endowment of the organization's interest and aid in the implementation of the initiative.

**Proposals:** Proposals must be submitted **by 5 p.m. (ET) on Monday, May 6, 2024**, through the *Nurturing Children* online Application Form on the [Endowment's website](#). The proposal must be uploaded as a single PDF with the following items in the order listed below.

- Official Request Letter
- Information Form
- Executive Summary
- Summary Budget
- Proposal Narrative (not to exceed 12 pages)
- Timetable
- Line-Item Budget and Budget Narrative (see Guide to Budget Preparation)
- Letter(s) of Support (optional)
- Copy of Organization's Current Year Operating Budget
- Copy of Organization's Audited Annual Financial Statements
- Exempt Status and Charity/Foundation Status Information Form
- Copy of IRS Exempt Status Determination Letter (sample available in the Resources section at the bottom of the *Nurturing Children* webpage)

Please email any questions to Jessicah Krey Duckworth at [nurturingchildren@lei.org](mailto:nurturingchildren@lei.org).