



2023

NURTURING CHILDREN THROUGH WORSHIP & PRAYER INITIATIVE

ANNUAL REPORT



**NOURISHING
VOCATION**
WITH CHILDREN

The Nourishing Vocation with Children Project assists congregations in expanding interdisciplinary artistic expression in worship, using multiple art forms – drama, movement, music, visual imagery, and poetry – for praise, prayer, and proclamation that both nourishes, and is nourished by children.

PROJECT LEADERSHIP

Dr. Jo Beld
Rev. Dr. Charlene Rachuy Cox
Sabrina Bakken
Dr. Pippa Younger

NURTURING CHILDREN THROUGH WORSHIP & PRAYER INITIATIVE

Nourishing Vocation with Children Project

2023 Annual Report

KEY OBJECTIVES

- 1** Enrich Children's Capacity to Serve, Love & Know God
 - 2** Child-Attentive Worship
 - 3** Arts-Enriched Worship
 - 4** Intergenerational Engagement
-

KEY AIMS

- To accompany children in Christian congregations as they grow in their capacity to know, love, and serve God by nourishing their active engagement in, and contributions to, arts-enriched congregational worship and prayer.
- To foster spiritual enrichment, teaching and learning, professional development, and a sense of shared vocation among participating St. Olaf faculty, staff, students, and alumni.

OUR TEAM



Dr. Jo Beld

*Vice President for Mission
Project Director, Nourishing
Vocation*



Rev. Dr. Charlene Rachuy Cox

*Director of Programming,
Engagement, & Innovation for
Congregational Thriving*



Sabrina Bakken

*Assistant Director of
Programming & Administration*



Dr. Pippa Younger

*Administrative Assistant for
The Lutheran Center and the
Nourishing Vocation Project*

BY THE NUMBERS



5

PILOT PROJECTS

- Elemental Ministry
- Opening God's Story
- Young at Heart
- Dressing Up the Bible
- Celebrate! Worship for Every Festival

22

CONSULTATIVE CONVERSATIONS

- 8 States
- 200-8,000 Member Congregations
- Small town/rural, small city, urban, & suburban contexts

156

CONGREGATIONS RECEIVING
THE CELEBRATE! WORSHIP
FOR EVERY FESTIVAL
LITURGIES

NURTURING CHILDREN THROUGH WORSHIP & PRAYER INITIATIVE

Nourishing Vocation with Children Project

2023 Annual Report

PROJECTS

- **Elemental Ministry**

- A child-attentive, young family-focused, intergenerational experience of connection, creativity, elemental engagement, and faith. Rooted in the basic elements of earth, water, fire, and air, and the worship elements of gather, word, meal, send, Elemental Worship is fully inclusive of people of all ages and abilities. The Elemental Ministry pilot was written by Rev. Amanda Dahlseng-Monroe with Bible story-based music composed by Rev. Nick Fisher-Broin, and liturgical music composed by Rev. Dave Efflandt. The 12-session pilot curriculum includes Bible Story Encounters, Arts Encounters, and Worship Encounters. Elemental Ministry is being piloted by Holy Cross Lutheran Church and Pastor Teresa Stewart in Spring Hill, Florida, in response to the concerns of families who have indicated that the traditional ways, routines, and places of church are not fitting with their lifestyles.

- **Opening God's Story**

- Designed to help an intergenerational community of faith more deeply know God, ourselves, and others through dwelling in the Gospel of Mark. Through this project, participants add to a WonderPod in worship each week and build a take home treasure chest that reminds, reinforces, and encourages further discoveries. Liturgical artist, Vonda Drees served as artistic collaborator for this project and created the foundational visual art. The congregation at large continues to create additional art through worship-based communal art experiences, bringing God's story to life in corporate worship. Opening God's story is being piloted by Immanuel Lutheran Church and Pastor Bree Truax in Rock Falls, Illinois.

- **Young at Heart**

- A worship service where the whole liturgy is intentionally intergenerational and designed with young people and families in mind. At this monthly service, worshipers encounter interactive storytelling, invitations for movement and wiggles, easy to learn (and love!) songs, and lots of grace for all the needs of everyone in the room - especially the littlest among us. Young at Heart is an immersion in God's delight in children, manifested through a corporate worship experience. Designed by Pastor Sarah Krolak, Young at Heart is being piloted at Faith Lutheran Church in Janesville, Minnesota and North Waseca Lutheran Church in Waseca, Minnesota.

- **Dressing Up the Bible**

- A child-attentive, intergenerational faith formation and worship experience through which Bible stories learned in Sunday School come to life through pick-up plays enacted in congregational worship. The primary actors are young children, and the whole congregation regularly participates in this interactive experience that brings the Bible stories to life. Dressing up the Bible is being piloted by Memorial Lutheran Church and Pastor Rebecca West-Estell in Toledo, Ohio.

- **Celebrate! Worship for Every Festival**

- Provides child-attentive, arts-enriched, intergenerational liturgies for the major festivals of the Christian liturgical year. The liturgies are designed to be ecumenically nimble and fully inclusive, providing opportunities for even the littlest to lead and be engaged throughout the entirety of each service.

NURTURING CHILDREN THROUGH WORSHIP & PRAYER INITIATIVE

Nourishing Vocation with Children Project

2023 Annual Report

REFLECTIONS

- Lay and professional church leaders alike are eager to embrace the aims of this initiative and of our project.
- The pilot projects are beginning to demonstrate that when we nurture the children, we nurture the entire congregation. Every project is having a positive impact, not only on the children who are participating, but also on the entirety of the intergenerational worshipping communities.
- Resources that are both stable and nimble, making them both accessible and adaptable is a value-added.

STORIES

1 Elemental Ministry: From Pastor Teresa Stewart - "We are excited to share that gathering in pleasant places at a time fitting for families in non-traditional ways gives us ample opportunity to share the life-giving Gospel of Jesus Christ. In a church with two elementary-aged children and no preschool-aged children in our congregation, we celebrate that upwards of 30 children participate weekly in the Art Experiences, and upwards of 35 children and 60 adults participate at our monthly Elemental Worship Experiences. The Elemental resources hold the message of the Gospel well and move us with joy as we journey through this endeavor. We continue to celebrate this opportunity to share the Gospel. An excellent unintended benefit is increased participation from retirees from the congregation and from the greater community, who are grateful to engage with children and be part of a church that is moving beyond the walls."

2 Opening God's Story: From Pr. Bree Truax - "Our journey with the Nourishing Vocation Project with an emphasis on child centered worship and prayer has been an immense gift to our whole congregation! In particular, young people seemingly stand taller and breathe deeper amidst the focused attention on them that this experience fosters. On March 10th we lifted up how the Spirit draws people to Jesus and how we are all a part of the Body of Christ while completing a painting prepared for us by Vonda Drees. Each person was invited to choose a color and place their thumb or finger print in the painting that will remain a part of our congregational space and remind us that we are all gathering Christ. It was a wondrous multi-generational morning! We are deeply grateful for the multi-layered ways that Nourishing Vocation allows young people and all people to encounter God! Young people (and all ages really) are coming to see that God's Story is our story; that God's Story is ever unfolding in our lives today! We are deeply grateful for these opportunities, for seeds planted and fed!"

3 Young at Heart: From Pastor Sarah Krolak - "While our kids are thriving with a liturgy intentionally designed with them in mind, our Young at Heart worship has become a gift for the whole community. It is a joy to look out into the congregation and see kids and adults alike gleefully dancing to songs together, being immersed in the Word as they help tell the story and praying with each other in new and creative ways. One child said, "it makes me feel happy," while older adults in our congregations have shared that it makes them feel young again. It has also strengthened our sense of community across the generations! In one of our congregations, Young at Heart has expanded to include Intergenerational Sunday School, while the other congregation has started enjoying breakfast and fellowship together after every Young at Heart service."

4 Dressing up the Bible: From Pastor Rebecca West-Estell - "Dressing up the Bible has been a wonderful way to engage young children in the stories of the Bible in a way that allows them to embrace Scripture and apply it to their lives. It has also promoted multi-generational learning in a way that I have not experienced in the 30 years I have been serving in youth ministry!"

NURTURING CHILDREN THROUGH WORSHIP & PRAYER INITIATIVE

Nourishing Vocation with Children Project

2023 Annual Report

WHAT COMES NEXT

JULY

- St. Olaf College Conference on Worship, Theology, and the Arts: Nourishing Vocation

SEPTEMBER

- Project-Based, Community of Practice Cohorts

FALL 2023 - WINTER 2024

- Project shared ecumenically with congregations, outdoor ministries, and judicatory gatherings

