



2025 ANNUAL REPORT

PREPARED FOR
Lilly Endowment Inc.
Nurturing Children Through
Worship and Prayer Initiative
Grant No. 2023 3291

“Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”

Mark 9:37 (NIV)

PREPARED BY
Stan Long
La Verne Tolbert

WELCOMING CHILDREN INTO WORSHIP

2025 Annual Report—Grant No. 2023 3291

GOAL

To develop an intergenerational ministry model that becomes a movement of intentionally engaging children during Sunday morning worship, beginning with COGIC churches in Southern and Northern California, which we pray will ignite churches around the country and globe over the next few years.

KEY OBJECTIVES

- Identify, design, and assess ways for African American churches to intentionally provide children with experiential intergenerational prayer and corporate worship activities;
- Develop a theological basis for intergenerational worship by creating a curriculum for pastors;
- Provide coaching and consulting to explore ways to evangelize and serve the community to reach families and children not attending church;
- Continue dialogues with the cohorts to expand their capacity to be creative about practical ways to engage children.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Our Northern CA Project Director, Dr. Stan Long, **encouraged** us to develop a theological basis for intergenerational worship. Dr. Tolbert wrote a 14-lesson curriculum published at www.teachable.com—**Children In The Pentateuch: A Theological Basis for Intergenerational Worship.**
- We **engaged** with Pastor White's "And the Bible Says" conference by presenting Welcoming Children Into Worship (**WCIW**, formerly Beyond Sunday School: Welcoming Children Into Worship) at Fuller Theological Seminary.
- We **explored** our options by retreating as a team to **reevaluate** our plans. We presented a 2025 Roadmap of activities to pastors, and they committed to our project.
- We commissioned an **evaluation** of each pastor's community—a 40-page report to learn more about children in the neighborhoods surrounding WCIW churches.

BY THE NUMBERS

4

14

WCIW has four Focus Groups: Pastors, Parents, Worship Leaders, and Children/Youth.

Out of 20, 14 pastors and their congregations are actively committed to this project as of 2024.

3

In year 3 (2026), we are invited to present our research to the COGIC First Jurisdiction comprised of 250 pastors in Southern CA.

\$640K

We are guided by our three-year budget to say "no" to additional expenses as we provide resources for churches.

OUR TEAM

We are committed to discipling children in our homes, churches, and communities!



Rev. Dr. Stan Long
Project Director, N. CA



Dr. La Verne Tolbert
Project Director, S. CA



Rosalind Sago, M. A.
Project Manager



Pastor Arlando Hill
Pastoral Liaison



Dr. Monica Austin
Research Analyst



Odette Kahwajian
Foster Care Liaison

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OBSERVATIONS

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- The Project Manager's advice to implement **Design Thinking** guided our 2023 research and 2024 focus group discussions. Once completed, we faced the challenge of presenting the results to pastors, parents, worship leaders, and children/youth in an understandable format. She introduced us to the Word Cloud, a compelling visual. Words are illuminated, themes highlighted, and multiple submissions are repeated to clarify findings. Everyone was grateful to learn the discoveries and often voiced their surprise. There were many "aha" moments.
- Our Advisor, **Dr. John Witvliet, Director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship** met with us when we felt discouraged. Much of what we had hoped to accomplish in year one had not yet occurred. Rather than being critical, our advisor listened and offered his reflections guided by one word: **pivot!** And so we did! Learning to be flexible is the best lesson ever!
- We discovered that most of our pastors in the **Church Of God In Christ (COGIC) denomination** are bi-vocational, with family, church, and work responsibilities all vying for their attention, energy, and time. How do we engage them without being a burden? Gently! Like a skilled ballerina, "Pivot!" has become our motto. We adjusted our schedule to align with the national COGIC events calendar.

STORIES

The power of visual arts was demonstrated when Project Director Dr. Stan Long, pastor emeritus of South Bay Community Church in Fremont, CA, shared a **video of his church's intergenerational services**.

Pastors watched children read Scripture, pray, and sing. What a memorable, teachable moment!

Dr. Long explained how to start and, more importantly, why starting now is urgent. Identifying children's gifts is where to begin, so we're providing churches with a Children's Spiritual Gifts Inventory.

3 After our October workshop, one of our LA pastors was determined to do something even though he had no children in his congregation. Then he realized he did have **one child—his grandson**—but the young child was shy about participating.

The pastor coached him to read Scripture. Two parents brought their sons the following week, and the pastor gave each an active role in the service. One boy invited his friend, who asked his parents to attend church with him. They did. "We are growing," the pastor exclaimed, "one child at a time!"

Children In The Pentateuch: A Theological Basis for Intergenerational Worship

Roadmap
2025

Engage Your Community

- Spring
 - 50 engagement strategies for "youth living in foster care"
 - GOSN Train church leaders
 - Foster parents and volunteers Training
 - Link-Jesus with Dr. Talbot Gossen
- Grow Your Church**
 - Summer
 - Leadership Lunches
 - Introduction Dance/Worship Model
 - Church Planting
 - Assessment (site visit)
 - Coordinate VBS
 - Grow Your Community**
 - Fall
 - Connect-a-Weekend
 - Ministry in the Marketplace

In our workshop sessions , one of our pastors shared that he invited a child to help serve communion. His experience resulted in a spirited conversation about children serving the Lord's Supper.

So, for Christmas 2024, thanks to the generosity of Dr. Witvliet and the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, we gifted 20 pastors with ***At God's Table*** — his beautifully illustrated book that explains the “why” of communion to children. Teaching children is vital to engaging them, which we emphasize.

God teaches us the power of one. Don't give up! We are God's hands, voice, and feet extended to do His will. We don't despise small beginnings. We start where we are and use what we have.

What WCIW pastors are saying:

- No one in the Black community is doing this kind of research to bring children to church.
- This project will be a seminal document that will help many churches.
- We thank God for you!

Project Purpose

The **Urban Outreach Foundation's** (UOF) mission is to equip pastors, leaders, and churches with coaching, courses, and curriculum for transformational growth. We coach ministries to identify and achieve strategic goals, offer courses to enhance ministry effectiveness and provide curriculum and training resources for spiritual formation and discipleship. Since 2020, we convened 300 pastors and leaders in coaching cohorts and innovative conferences. For over 50 years, we provided strategic community and economic development resources to African American and multi-ethnic churches.

~Rev. Dr. Stanley Long, Executive Director



A church without children is a dying church! is our motto. The mission of **Teaching Like Jesus Ministries** (TLJM) is to equip leaders in the local church—pastors, parents, teachers, and volunteers—to be intentional about children's discipleship. For decades, we accomplished our mission with interdenominational seminars in California and throughout cities in the United States. Our focus had been Sunday School, but this phase of our efforts is beyond Sunday School, "Welcoming Children Into Worship."

~Dr. La Verne Tolbert, CEO/President



UOF and TLJM are the perfect partnership to identify, design, and assess ways for African American churches to promote and provide children in the inner-city with experiential intergenerational prayer and corporate worship activities in Southern and Northern California.