



2023

**imaginarium**  
at Indiana Wesleyan University



# MEET THE IMAGINARIUM



## REFLECTIONS FROM 2023

It is difficult to express just how grateful I am to have worked with this team for the last year. It is such a blessing to get to do meaningful work alongside of people you enjoy. This was a stretching year in that we gained new team members as well as many new grantees in the Strengthening Ministry with Children Coordination Program. In both cases, the “stretch” was well worth it. I believe I speak for all of us at the Imaginarium when I say what a privilege it is to be able to support so many different ministries. It’s a joy to work alongside churches eager to create room in their sanctuaries to welcome children with special needs. It’s a joy to coach churches who are launching new ways of connecting with young adults. We love hearing about the programs that are popping up all over the country that are focused on equipping parents to disciple their children. Additionally, we are grateful for our friends and colleagues in Theology and Ministry at IWU. Talking over coffee and popping into offices has deeply enriched our work.

Warmly,  
Amanda Drury  
Executive Director of the Imaginarium

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## OUR TEAM



**Brandon Charlton**  
*Assistant Director of Christian Parenting & Caregiving*



**Rev. Amanda Drury, PhD**  
*Executive Director of Initiatives with Children and Youth*



**Rev. Ronnie Farmer Jr**  
*Director of Christian Parenting & Caregiving*



**Rev. Ethan Linder**  
*Associate Director of Imaginarium: Young Adults*



**Lauren Shepherd**  
*Director of Nurturing Children Through Worship and Prayer*



**Carsyn Stout**  
*Creative Development and Content Manager*



**Shami Grieve \***  
*Director of Operations and Project Management*



**Emilie Tidwell \***  
*Project Coordinator and Administrative Assistant*

**\*JOINING THE IMAGINARIUM TEAM IN 2024**





# STRENGTHENING MINISTRY WITH CHILDREN COORDINATION PROGRAM

*The Strengthening Ministry with Children Coordination Program supports projects led by 157 organizations across the United States. These organizations - including congregations, denominations, religious agencies, colleges, universities, and seminaries - have received grants from Lilly Endowment Inc. to implement projects through one of two initiatives. We support these projects through hosting an annual gathering, offering webinars, facilitating an on-going learning community, and providing programmatic support.*

## ANNUAL GATHERING 2023



## BY THE NUMBERS

# 125

grantees and consultants attended the Annual Gathering in Indianapolis November 6-8, 2023.

# 53

individuals attended Open Office Hours between June-December.

# 95

individuals attended introductory calls to get to know our team and share project joys and challenges.

# 103

new organizations joined the Christian Parenting initiative at the end of 2023.

## GRANT INITIATIVES



### CHRISTIAN PARENTING & CAREGIVING INITIATIVE

The Christian Parenting and Caregiving Initiative is designed to support parents and other caregivers as they share their faith and values with their children.



### NURTURING CHILDREN THROUGH WORSHIP & PRAYER INITIATIVE

The Nurturing Children Through Worship and Prayer Initiative supports efforts to help congregations design worship services and prayer practices that more intentionally and fully engage children.



**READ ABOUT THE GRANTEES HERE**

# ★ IMAGINARIUM: YOUTH

*Imaginarium: Youth aims to journey alongside teenagers, encouraging a love for God's Word and supporting innovative projects rooted in Christian practices that deepen their love for God and neighbor. We use creative tools and dynamic processes to foster spiritual growth through design thinking, building community, cultivating empathy, and sparking creativity.*

## SEE WHAT GRANTEES ARE CREATING

### ADVENT GRIEF BOXES

Three Rivers Wesleyan Church  
Fort Wayne, IN



The Advent Grief Box was created to help people who are grieving feel less isolated during the holidays and still participate in the Advent Season. There are two versions for the box: one for general loss and one specifically for the loss of a parent.

### TEEN RESPONDERS

St. Luke's United Methodist Church  
Indianapolis, IN



Teen Responders is a free mental health workshop where teens and adults can gain the knowledge, skills, and resources to care themselves and respond to the needs of their peers. The workshops focus on three main topics: boundaries, healthy coping strategies, and recognizing and responding to crisis.

## BY THE NUMBERS

26

pastors went through our Imaginarium: Youth training program.

\$144K

was distributed in grants to churches that are finding fresh ways to engage in ministry with teenagers.

35

churches and organizations participated in the Imaginarium: Youth programs.

## IMPACT STORY: TEEN LAUNCHES BUSINESS IN GRANT COUNTY

Stephanie Treto grew up dreaming of being a business owner herself. That dream became a reality before Stephanie even graduated high school. Her congregation – St. Paul’s Catholic Parish – was willing to partner with Stephanie and The Imaginarium to reach their neighborhoods, and expand her business; that’s allowed Stephanie to see how churches and businesses can come together to help communities thrive.

In 2022, she began wondering how she might start a business in high school, and have her career ready for her when she graduated. Thinking about how ice cream brings people together – and seeing a market opportunity, Stephanie used her savings to start Neveria Tropical – an ice cream shop in her hometown. She started designing the shop in January 2023 with the ideas of her favorite colors, pink and green, and later that summer, her business was open.



Figuring out everything from organizational structure to community-based marketing was a big task for a high schooler, but her network helped her find the resources she needed to bring a good business plan to life; and her work-study school structure allowed her to be hands-on with both her classes and her business. Stephanie’s family has always supported her entrepreneurial efforts, and she shared that her dad has been a great mentor for her. As for help with the shop, she hired four employees. One of her favorite things about running a business is figuring it out with a team. She explains that there’s joy in learning how to ideate ways to make things easier together.

One major accomplishment to improve the business was the purchase of an ice cream machine, which was made possible through the business’s success, and grant partnerships with the Imaginarium at Indiana Wesleyan University and her congregation, St. Paul’s Catholic Parish.

“We inquired about whether Stephanie had any connection with a local church,” recalled Amanda Drury. “When she heard the question, her eyes lit up and she immediately responded: ‘Oh yes, I’m really connected with St. Paul’s Catholic Parish.’ When we asked if there was any connection between her business and her church she was perplexed and intrigued.”

After a series of emails and meetings, St. Paul’s and Stephanie decided to partner with one another to see if Neveria Tropical could have a more missional presence in our community. The Imaginarium awarded St. Paul’s a \$15,000 grant—they in turn partnered with Neveria Tropical to host pop-up events that connect St. Paul’s to the local neighborhoods. The grant provided seed money so Neveria Tropical could have their own ice cream machine. Prior to that investment, Stephanie or one of her employees was taking a 3-hour round trip every few days to purchase ice cream from another supplier.

Stephanie explains that she feels blessed to be considered a successful, young entrepreneur. When asked how she overcame any doubt or skepticism about the venture, her heart for Christ shined through. She shared, “I trust God and believe that any success comes from following Him.”





# IMAGINARIUM: PARENTS



*Imaginarium Parents inspires parents and caregivers to be intentional about the spiritual formation of children. We believe the home is the primary location for faith formation, and all our efforts resource parents and caregivers towards understanding how they might better lead their child in the way of Jesus. We offer grants to churches, facilitate spaces for parents to journey together, and create resources that champion in-home discipleship.*

## 2023 GRANT ACTIVITIES

- **Family Staff Retreat:** We hosted a three-day family retreat focused on testing spiritual formation resources that can be used in the context of bedtime.
- **Website Launch:** We launched a refreshed Imaginarium website to provide a resource and landing page for local stakeholders who are committed to spiritual formation among children.
- **Church VBS Connect:** We partnered with El Taco don Burro, a local food truck, to serve free tacos to VBS volunteers at various local churches in Grant County to celebrate their commitment to the spiritual formation of children.
- **Resource Focus Group Launch:** Nine families gathered together to engage with the resources we developed. They spent 4-5 weeks with these resources and provided critical feedback to our team.
- **Grant County Children's Pastor's Lunch:** We extended an invitation to all Grant County children's pastors to join us for a lunch to learn more about the initiative and how we can partner together.
- **Inaugural Pastor's Advisory Board Meeting:** We brought together 13 pastors from local churches in our community to form an advisory board and hosted our first meeting. These pastors will provide feedback related to the needs of Grant County churches throughout the life of the project.
- **Gospel Choir Performances:** The IWU Gospel Choir led worship 11 times at chapel services, church events, and campus events. These performances featured songs rooted in Spirituals. We look forward to incorporating these songs into children's events in 2024.

## BY THE NUMBERS



**11**

bedtime discipleship resources were created for and tested by parents.

**258**

volunteers served with tacos during local Vacation Bible Schools.

**18**

local children's pastors who attended a lunch to learn about our initiative.

**13**

local pastors committed to being on our initiative's advisory board.



# IMAGINARIUM: PARENTS



## TESTIMONIALS FROM PARENTS AND PASTORS

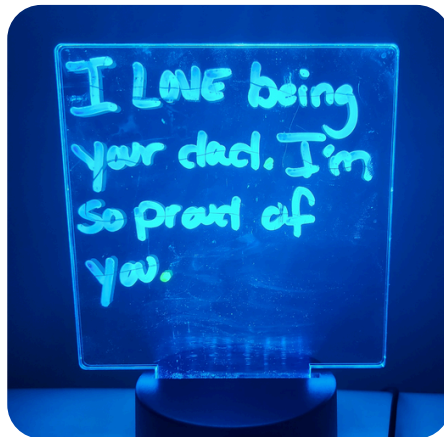


"Thank you a million times over for your partnership with children's ministries across our county. Having Don Burros here on our VBS was such delight for us all. Your collaboration with us in ministry truly refreshed my soul as you allow me to do for my volunteers what I dream of but often find difficult. Your work and heart is restorative to me. Thank you!"

**Stephanie Freemyer, College Wesleyan Church**

"We have enjoyed using the Forgiveness Bowl in our home. I think for an older child it prompted me to create and use the same concept just differently. I love the idea that once you write it down, submit it to God and others it disappears! This is awesome and adults need it as much as kids!"

**The Robinson Family**



# YOUNG ADULT INNOVATION HUB

*In January 2023, the Imaginarium launched the Young Adult Innovation Hub to partner with congregations to develop relationships, construct spaces, and offer opportunities to engage and empower young adults in transformational ministry. The Young Adult Innovation Hub encourages congregations to reimagine ministries that attend to the marks of young adulthood in their own unique contexts.*

## HOW IT WORKS



### PHASE ONE: \$500

We will grant \$500 to 30 churches eager to partner with young adults to find fresh ways to love God and neighbor.

Once the churches receive the money, it's time to spend it! This is the perfect opportunity to do something fast, fun, and creative.

When the project is over, churches send us three photos with three captions that showcase how they spent the money and what they learned.



### PHASE TWO: \$1,000

In phase two, we will grant \$1,000 to 10 churches eager to continue their efforts to engage and empower young adults in their communities.

It's the same routine as last time: get the money, partner with young adults, and spend it! When they're done with their project, the churches send us three photos and captions so we can see how they implemented their project.



### PHASE THREE: \$15,000

In the final phase, we will select 6 churches to serve as Young Adult Innovation Hub Fellows. We'll fly a team from each church down to Orlando for a week of guided scheming and dreaming about what they might do with a \$15,000 grant.

Next, we'll help the churches host a DIY retreat to help keep their project moving along. When they are done, we'll bring the churches to Indiana Wesleyan University for a Story Slam to share what happened with others.

## BY THE NUMBERS

16

churches received grants to participate in the first phase of the Young Adult Innovation Hub.

23

gatherings/events took place that empowered and included young adults.

34

grants were given to 16 partner congregations across 10 states.

\$99K

was distributed in grants to churches that are finding fresh ways to engage in ministry alongside young adults.





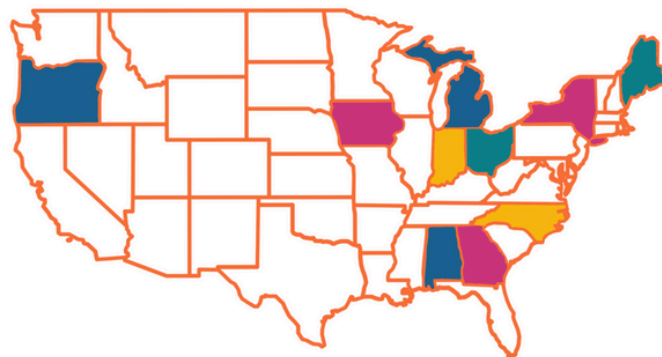
## 2023 GRANT ACTIVITIES

- 2023 was a significant year for our team as we were able to put our plans into action and get a sense of what our programming as a whole looks like. We offered multiple rounds of sub-granting, starting with small grants for numerous congregations and ending with large grants for just a handful of congregations.
- We had a strong hunch that congregations would be drawn to the “low hanging fruit” of simple applications and simple reporting (3 pictures and 3 captions) and based on the feedback we’ve received from churches, we believe this hunch proved to be true.
- We spent a good deal of time meeting as a committee to discuss individual churches and their projects and adjudicating various applications from congregations wanting to move further in the granting process. By May of 2023, we had offered six congregations “fellows” positions, offering them a place at our Orlando Hatchathon as well as the opportunity to apply for \$15,000 sub-grants.
- In the summer of 2023, we launched two resources: “The Gifts You Bring” and “Treasure Mapping” in order to help congregations explore where their gifts and community needs align.

## KEY OBJECTIVES

- 1 Dialogue with congregations on ministering to and with young adults as it pertains to their interests, concerns, and longings.
- 2 Equip congregations to minister alongside young adults to engage in ministry in their local contexts.
- 3 Support congregations as they design, test, and implement new models of ministry.
- 4 Collect and disseminate effective and meaningful ministry models that can be scaled and adapted in various contexts.

## GRANTEE GEOGRAPHY



**Church on the North Coast**, Lorain, OH  
**City Life Church**, Grand Rapids, MI  
**College Wesleyan Church**, Marion, IN  
**Daybreak Church**, Hudsonville, MI  
**God's House**, Marion, IN  
**Grace Fellowship Church**, Princeton, IN  
**Houlton Wesleyan Church**, Houlton, ME  
**Iglesia Cristiana Bethel**, Portland, OR

**Kingdom Life Church**, Gas City, IN  
**LifeSpring Wesleyan Church**, Richmond, IN  
**New Journey Church**, Wabash, IN  
**One Church**, High Point, IN  
**One Hope Church**, Tuscaloosa, AL  
**Resurrection Life NYC**, New York, NY  
**RISE Coffee and Tea**, Roswell, GA  
**Table Church**, Des Moines, IA

## PHASE TWO GRANT PROJECTS



**New Journey Community Church | Wabash, Indiana**

Young adults at this church chose to partner with a local youth center to host a Cinco de Mayo celebration during their town's First Fridays event. By working with the youth center, the team shared they not only extended their outreach to the community but also furthers their goal of living out their young adult ministry mission to "go and make disciples."



**Resurrection Life NYC | New York, NY**

To launch The 6% Project, the team presented their vision for the Young Adult Initiative at several churches across New York City. The 6% Project seeks to build a community that nurtures, supports, and equips young adults to become leaders who will inspire generational change.

## HATCHATHON IN ORLANDO, FLORIDA



**Amber Cook | Grace Fellowship Church**

"We have a clear plan moving forward that all of us feel confident was God-given! That is huge!!! Our team also grew in confidence and leadership skills."



**Colicus Jones | One Hope Church**

"What an honor to have been able to participate in this wonderful opportunity! Truly a gift to Young Adults across the nation and the church as a whole! Thank you to the Imaginarium team for all your hard work! Much fruit to come."



# WHAT COMES NEXT IN 2024

## IMAGINARIUM: PARENTS

### MARCH

- Award Synergy and Exploration grants to 3-5 Grant County churches.

### APRIL

- Host "When You Sleep Workshop" for local pastors and parents and follow up with evaluative efforts.

### FEBRUARY-DECEMBER

- Host quarterly Advisory Board meetings.
- Gospel choir practices and performances.
- Launch podcast on Apple and Spotify.
- Launch Band Groups with local pastors and parents with a kick-off retreat in Indianapolis.

### ONGOING

- Harriet Tubman project planning.

## IMAGINARIUM PROJECTS



[imaginariumiwu.com](http://imaginariumiwu.com)

## YOUNG ADULT INNOVATION HUB

### JANUARY

- Match Cohort 1 Fellows with Ministry Incubators coaches to begin 6 months of coaching.
- Cohort 2 Phase 1 grantees announced (at least 15 churches) to receive \$500.

### APRIL

- Cohort 2 Phase 2 grantees announced (at least 10 churches) to receive \$1,000.

### JUNE

- Cohort 2 Fellows announced (6 churches) to attend Hatchathon in Orlando.
- Mail out "Treasure Mapping" and "The Gifts Your Bring" activities and retreat funds in preparation for Hatchathon.

### AUGUST- SEPTEMBER

- Strategic planning for Cohort 1 Story Slam.
- Send out Pivot Retreat grants to Cohort 1 Fellows.

### SEPTEMBER

- Mail copies of Whoopsie game to Cohort 1 Fellows Congregations to do a one-year assessment of their work.

### OCTOBER

- Cohort 2 Fellows attend Hatchathon in Orlando, Florida October 7-11.

### NOVEMBER

- Cohort 2 Fellows submit proposals for \$15,000.

### DECEMBER

- Registration opens for Cohort 1 Fellows Story Slam.

