CENTER FOR CHILDREN AND THEOLOGY

ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 2023

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

WE WORKED SO HARD IN 2023!

With a grant in hand to develop Grace Space Families we doubled our work. Existing staff took on extra tasks, Jodi-beth McCain was hired as Program Director, Allison Winter as Communications Director, Sarah Christopher as Website Developer, and these project leaders are developing programs and resources to support families nurturing their children's faith:

- **Community Atrium** Kay Perdue Meadows
- **Baptism Classes and Post-Baptism Groups** Joyce Scherer-Hoock, Deb Pelletier
- **Beloved Community – Anti-bias and Anti-Racism (ABAR) and Gospel Nonviolence *Leaders:*** Jodi-beth McCain and Anita Vincent
- **Neurodiversity and Church Life** Elizabeth Vice
- **Music & Books** Beverly Sanders, Christina and David Hansen, and Elizabeth Vice music project; Tracy Gaestel, book project
- **Video Orientation for Parents Sharing Faith at Home** Rebecca Malone
- **Integrating Faith and Science through Creation Care** Catherine Maresca and Joel David Musser
- **Parents and Toddlers: Growing in Faith Together** Davette Himes
- **Catechist Action Research in the Atrium (CARA)** Catherine Maresca and Anita Vincent

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT CON'T

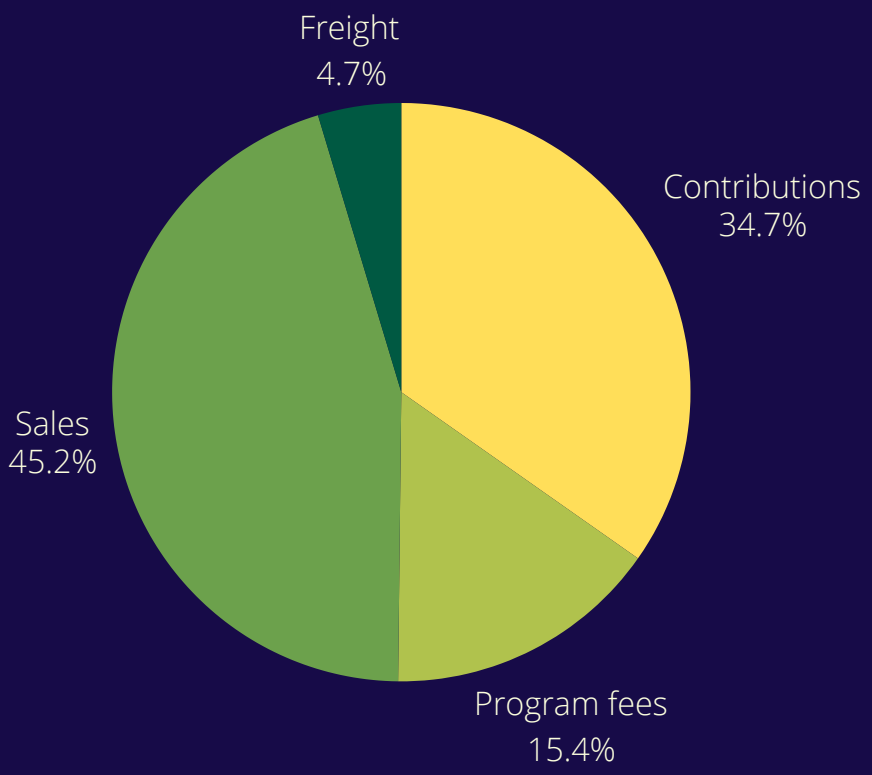
Our finance graphics below indicate that our usual income streams, including donations, provided funds for the programs, courses, resources and research that we have been offering since 1995, and the grant from Lilly Endowment Inc provides funds for the new initiatives listed above.

Coming in 2024: *Breath by Breath, Bringing Yoga and Mindfulness into the Lives of Children* by Nancy Siegel; a book exploring the life and work of Gianna Gobbi by Liisa Peterson; guided CARA program for catechists ready to observe and document a specific aspect of the work in the atrium; and a flow of resources and news from the the projects listed above.

We are so blessed to have a dedicated and talented circle of leaders and staff to continue the critical work of embracing the current needs and gifts of children today, while deeply rooted in work of Sofia Cavalletti and Gianna Gobbi in the Atrium.

CATHERINE MARESCA
Director

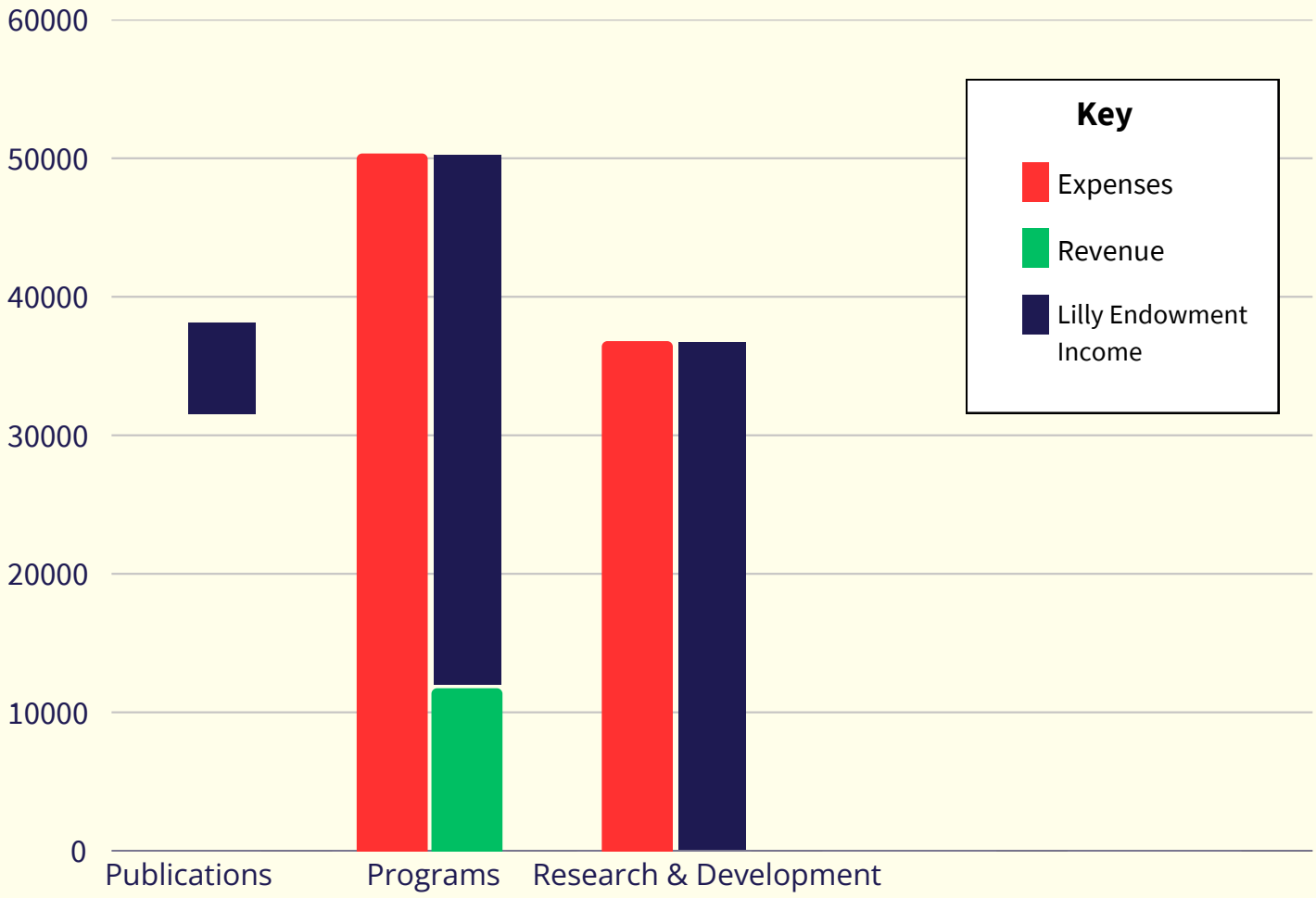
FINANCIAL OVERVIEW



2023 SOURCES OF REVENUE

This graph does not include the three-year grant of $550,000 from Lilly Endowment Inc., as part of a new Christian Parenting and Caregiving Initiative. This grant supports our new projects.

A Year in Review



Thanks to our grant from the Lilly Endowment Inc. we were able to supplement our usual income for these programs, enabling us to push forward 12 new programs or areas of research in 2023.

Financial Statements

	2023
Revenue	$43,097
Grant Income	$82,279
Expenses	$125,376

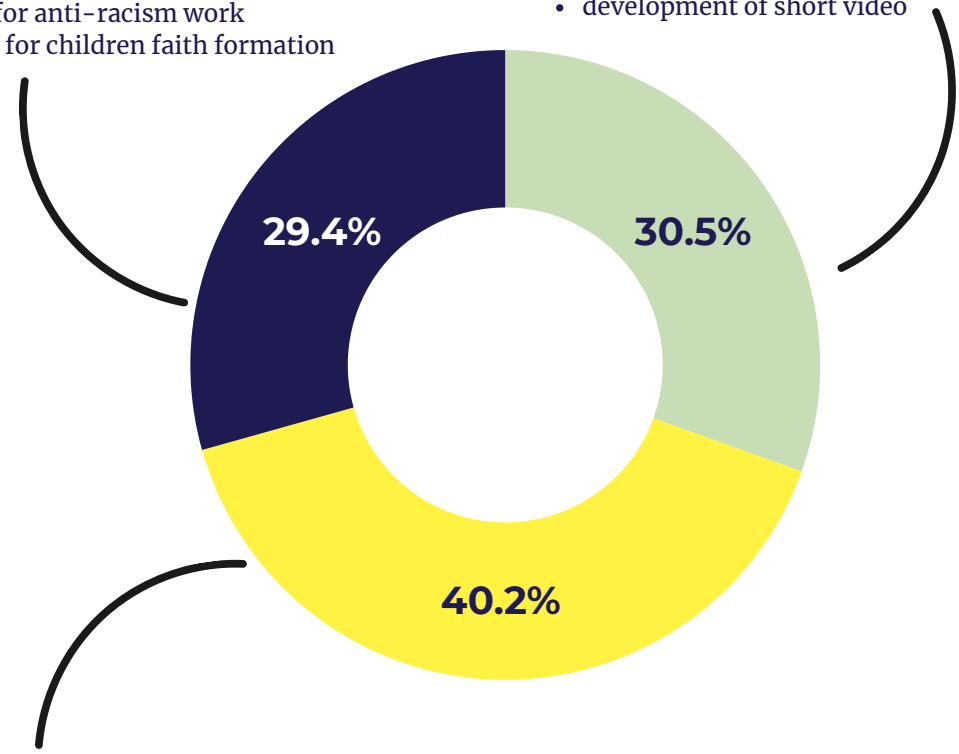
2023 Expenses

Research & development:

- ongoing research in integration of science and faith
- research for serving children with autism
- research for anti-racism work
- book lists for children faith formation

Publications & other resources printed or purchased and sold:

- two new books prepared for publication
- seasonal songlists for prayer with children
- children's book lists
- reprints of previously published books
- development of short video



Programs:

- 2 courses, 4 orientation workshops, multiple online conversations
- Development and offering of a course for ministers about Baptism preparation with families.
- Development of an action research program for Catechists.
- Development of an eco-spirituality program for adolescents.
- Development of a program for working with chidren with autism.
- Development of anti-racism work.
- Development of community, rather than congregational, religious education for children.
- Development of parent-toddler work for parishes.

PROJECT UPDATE

Our new projects for the grant from Lilly Endowment, Inc, Grace Space Families, draws on the passions and work of many contributors. Its purpose is to support Christian parents, caregivers, children, and congregational leaders as they grow in their faith together.

The Center for Children and Theology's mission is to serve catechists, parents, and pastors as they seek to nurture children's spiritual life. Grace Space Families directly relates to our mission and calls on our expertise, our network of existing relationships, and our unique position at the growing edge of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. It challenges us to work more directly with parents to help them enjoy the gift of children's spiritual insights in their home and family life

Much of our work in the first year of our three-year grant focused on tending the soil and planting seeds for new projects. Our projects are each developing roots and beginning to grow.

Community Atrium Kay Perdue Meadows launched a pilot community atrium site in New Haven, Conn. It is a shared space for faith formation for children from eight parishes that can no longer each sustain their own Sunday school programs. In the first year, with two parishes participating, enrollment in pre K/kindergarten religious education classes increased almost 50%. In the second year, six more parishes joined. This increase in enrollment, especially in an age group that has traditionally been considered too young for religious formation, is a sign that families see the fruits of the work and desire to participate.

"Our children are blessed and their love of Christ is undeniable. This fuels an impact on their parents that makes them want to draw closer to the work, which is to draw closer to Christ." *-Kay Perdue Meadows.*

Baptism Class Rev. Scherer-Hoock wrote and presented a four session course, "Baptized: Opening the Gift." We offered this live, online course twice. Participants were clergy and lay directors of religious education. Participants have already formed at least 5 baptism preparation groups. Participants shared that they saw gaps in how their churches offer baptismal formation and demonstrated a hunger for this approach to baptismal formation. One participant shared that the course equipped her to lead robust baptismal preparation classes at her church and that she has seen greater participation from those families at church. *"The course enabled me, as Director of Family, Youth and Children's Ministry, to build relationships with those families on a totally deeper level than I had before, even the families I knew. The class gave me the structure to do that," one class participant shared.*

"The parents who came to the class, I'm seeing more of them in church on a regular basis." - *course participant from* ***Baptized: Opening the Gift***

A screenshot from a video for *Baptized: Opening the Gift*

Beloved Community – Anti-bias and Anti-Racism (ABAR) and Gospel Nonviolence. Jodi-beth McCain and Anita Vincent began the process to design and create podcasts on ABAR and Gospel Nonviolence issues. They chose core questions and designed the script for four podcast episodes. They identified themes from the children's discussion around the Doctrine of Discovery and some Gospel Non-Violence materials. They listened to children with regard to these themes and followed their energy and concerns. This process allowed the leaders to grow and learn by listening to children and trusting that they can put the darkness of some parts of history into perspective, trusting in the redeeming light and hope of cosmic communion.

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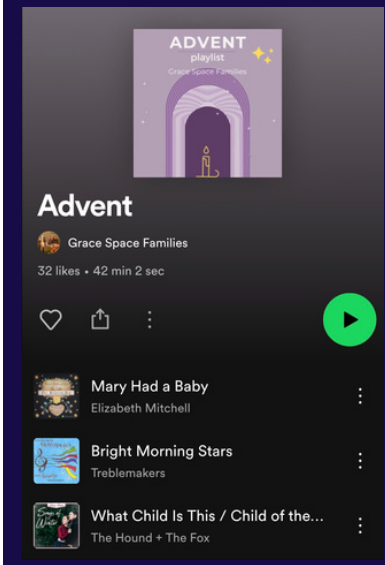
Neurodiversity and the Church Elizabeth Vice researched articles and data about autistic children's experiences and reached out to dozens of groups and individuals working in this community. She conducted in-depth interviews with catechists and autistic children and adults about their experiences in church. She identified some of their obstacles to participation in church. Over the course of the interviews, she heard frustration regarding limited resources and lack of willingness to listen to concerns. "The level of anxiety that builds over time is high, also the feeling of being unheard or under-appreciated," Vice shared. Vice began compiling their narratives and creating resources and infographics for educating church leadership and providing family resources.

"I was so encouraged at the determination of these kids to stick with God. They were still hunting for the voice of God."
- *Elizabeth Vice*



Music and books For the music project, we explored how to share beloved age-appropriate songs of praise and worship in ways that parents can easily access (online or streaming services). We shared Advent playlists on Spotify and Amazon Music. We are also working on an annotated book list to recommend a variety of children's books that will represent the diversity of children and backgrounds.

Integrating Faith and Science through Creation Care

Joel David Musser, MA, MTS, director of CGS at Immaculate Conception Church & Immaculata Catholic School in Durham, NC, started preparing the soil in his community to pilot a creation care curriculum for adolescents. "Just our Common Home" will help them articulate how humans are integrated with ecosystems and how this relates to their faith. Catherine Maresca wrote three essays on faith and science and a proposal for catechists that will support reflection with children on faith and science during CGS presentations.

Catechist Action Research in the Atrium

We contracted with John Chattin-McNichols, an expert in the field of Montessori research, to develop a course on "action research." This project, Catechist Action Research in the Atrium, builds on work we began in 2019. CARA participants can receive training in basic qualitative and quantitative research methods and support one another in establishing habits of action and reflection informed by the disciplined gathering of data in and beyond the atrium. Chattin-McNichols recorded a series of videos for us to use for the course.

Orientation to Shared Faith Rebecca Malone created a working group with nine members to meet biweekly and plan videos that will inform, inspire and equip caregivers to explore key areas of sharing faith with children. The audience for our work will include families already well-connected to Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS), families tangentially connected to CGS, and families CGS hasn't reached yet. Videos will include topics like prayer, wondering questions, and 'Who is God?'

"Our overarching dream for parents: to encounter God, to know Jesus as the children know him, to recognize the Holy Spirit at work in and through their child and themselves." Rebecca Malone

Parents and Toddlers: Growing in Faith Together Davette Himes prepared the soil for her project with research, networking, and cultivating relationships– at conferences and conventions, in meetings and site visits, and with potential vendors. Himes narrowed down a list of what is essential to start a parent-toddler atrium, refined resources, and met with potential vendors that could make puzzles or other materials. She is working on ambitious plans for satellite locations for parent-toddler learning labs.

Organizational Impact The Center for Children and Theology is broadening our work, bringing more people on the team, and thinking strategically about growth. Previously, our focus as an organization has been on catechists, and our support for parents was tangential. Now, support for parents and families is a core part of almost all of our conversations. The grant provides the fertilizer for the seedlings these project leaders have been tending – allowing us to pursue work in three years that would have otherwise taken a decade or more.