



PATHWAYS TO Prayer & Practice

Pathways to Prayer & Practice: 2026 Convention Report

Project Overview & Purpose

The Pathways to Prayer & Practice initiative, funded by the Lilly Endowment, supports congregations across the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia as they imagine new ways to more fully welcome children into worship, deepen faith at home, and grow intergenerational spiritual life. The program shifts the focus from simply accommodating children to valuing them as indispensable members of the congregation whose presence helps us recognize where God is bringing new life.

2026 Cohort Activities & Milestones

Our inaugural year launched with overwhelming interest. Originally planned for five churches, the readiness across the Diocese led to an expanded Cohort One of 10 diverse congregations representing seven regions.

- **Preparation Phase (Spring 2026):** From February to May, the cohort engaged in virtual workshops led by national ministry experts. These sessions focused on Asset-Based Community Development, Intergenerational Ministry, and leading culture change, moving participants from asking, "How do we get kids to sit still?" to "How can this prayer practice feel like church to a fourth grader?"
- **Innovation Phase (Summer 2026):** In July, all 10 churches gathered at Shrine Mont for a 2.5-day "Hatchathon" retreat facilitated by Ministry Architects. Utilizing design thinking tools, each parish team developed, tested, and pitched a concrete ministry experiment focused on the five core pillars: Scripture, Prayer, Eucharist, Music, and Sacred Space.
- **Implementation Phase (Fall 2026):** Following the retreat, each church was paired with a dedicated Ministry Innovation Coach. These coaches provide monthly one-on-one guidance as parishes launch their mini-grant projects and navigate local cultural shifts.
- **Advisory Team Launch:** Formed an Advisory Team of diverse leaders from across the Diocese to serve as advocates, provide external perspectives, and help guide the long-term vision and sustainability of the Pathways initiative.

Impact & Learnings

The work of Pathways is centered on profound culture change. While shifting congregational culture takes time, the momentum we are seeing is undeniable. The key success of this first year is that all 10 churches are faithfully *trying* something new, taking concrete steps to reimagine worship with children at the center. People are talking about the project across the diocese, and the excitement is spreading. Feedback has been deeply positive, with participants noting the value of strategic thinking and actionable tools to build multi-generational visions. As

one participant shared, "I think what is resonating... is not the focus on children, but a multi-generational vision that fully embraces children... as ALL equally the body of Christ." This growing enthusiasm is evident as applications for Cohort Two are now open—with more than six applications already received in just the first two weeks!

Looking Ahead

Through strong partnerships with Diocesan leadership, our Advisory Team, and the Communications Team, we are distributing these learnings diocese-wide. We continue to rely on empathetic design and faithful experimentation until we achieve true, diocesan-wide transformation in how we nurture the faith of our children.