



**Ministry Report**  
**for the year ending August 31, 2020**

## Overview

The word that keeps coming to describe 2020 is “unprecedented.” Due to consistent financial support during a tumultuous season, we have been able to respond. We continue mentoring and equipping parents from all walks of life with timeless, Gospel-centered resources geared toward these unique times. As a result, our active subscriber community has grown to over 35,000 engaged parents from all over the world. One of the trainees in our coaching certification program emphatically told us, “*I truly believe Connected Families is uniquely poised for these unique times!*” We believe it too, and are working diligently to offer parents the eternal hope of God’s grace and truth made practical for parenting.

What follows are descriptions of the various programs we’ve offered, and statements of impact from various team members with regard to their ministry focus. You’ll also get a picture of future plans to care for, inspire, and equip parents who are learning to *lead* their families with *grace*.

## Ministry Purpose

The Connected Families core purpose is “...to care for, inspire, and equip parents to receive and pass on God’s grace and truth by imparting a biblical, memorable, and transformational framework for parenting.” This purpose inspires staff in all positions to consider it a part of their ministry to care directly for parents within their specific work context. In the ministry year ending on Aug 31, 2020, through both standard ministry approaches and numerous adjustments due to Covid-19 restrictions, Connected Families achieved this core purpose with more parents than ever. The strategies and results of our efforts are highlighted in the following report.

## Ministry Results

We hear *daily* from parents impacted by the ministry you support. A typical story is like Lauren’s, a single mom who could not have accessed many of our resources without additional financial support.

*Connected Families has been a lifeline. The coaching, courses, and community have given me a sense of belonging and perspective, the reassurance that I am not alone in parenting even if I am the only adult in the house. They have so many practical parenting tips that help me parent children with 'big' emotions. They also connected me with other single moms who have had similar situations to my own.*

*I have also appreciated Connected Families' generosity. If I had to pay full price for the course or the coaching, I would not be able to participate in these options. Instead, Connected Families made it easy for me as a single mom to seek a reduced rate for my financial situation. I am so thankful for what I have learned from the Biblically-based and practical help that equip me to be a better parent.*

*I am so thankful.  
Lauren*

Stories like Lauren’s keep us fueled to keep working hard to effectively guide and equip any parent who is seeking to lead their family with grace!

**The BIG GOAL** Connected Families is pursuing:

***Millions of parents impacted by the Connected Families’ guiding framework for parenting.***

The work to get there is organized in a two-layer process that guides parents toward transformational impact. What follows is a review of the process and programs that currently impact tens of thousands of parents like Lauren.

## Ministry Strategy

### Layer 1: Broad online strategies to introduce parents to Connected Families:

The ways and places parents search for help are ever expanding. Our efforts and focus are limited for now to the most popular social media platforms as follows. In the past year:

- **Facebook** outreach has generated a 25% increase over the past year to over 20,000 followers (FB community that asks for daily encouragement).
- Our **Podcast** channel now has 44 episodes and each is downloaded an average of over 5,000 times.
- Our **Instagram** community reach is nearing 5000 members.
- We recently added a **YouTube** channel with Christ-centered tips for parents.
- During August there were 27,000 **website** visits (up over 50% since last year at this time)
- 10,805 new parents subscribed to receive weekly parenting tip **emails**. (Total of nearly 36,000 active subscribers.) Open rates for these emails are nearly 30%, which is a way higher open rate than industry average!

As parents are introduced to Connected Families, and subscribe to one or more of our social media channels, they become familiar with (and ultimately more willing to participate in) more in-depth programs.

### Layer 2: Caring for parents in real-time through “impact” programs:

Each of the following programs is designed to deepen impact on parents' lives; to make it more natural or normal to lead their families with grace.

- **Workshops:** During the past year, **4,182 parents attended 76 live workshops** presented by 5 Connected Families Staff. As part of the “Covid adjustment,” we recently conducted 5 virtual real-time workshops to an estimated 400 parents. The coordinator of one of these workshops said, *“The night flowed really well! I just love how you were able to change it up to deliver in this format. I didn’t feel that it missed anything from an in-person session.”*
- **Coaching: 101 families received intensive coaching** (at least two sessions) from 3 Connected Families coaches.
- **Online Courses:** 4 online courses with real-time access to moderators offered to **over 2890 registrants** (over 4000 total parents). This is more than double what we saw at this time in 2019. We offer these courses for low prices to assure strong registration, and we offer varying levels of scholarships without encumbrance to all who ask. We surveyed the community in August to determine whether a pricing change was sensible and 100’s of parents essentially said, “Your courses are worth much more than you suggest, but your ministry mindset makes them priceless AND readily available without hesitation to those needing what you offer.”

Our flagship online course, ***Discipline That Connects with Your Child’s Heart*** is offered twice annually and is moderated by our team member, Stacy Bellward. Throughout the course authors and co-founders, Jim and Lynne, offer three live Q&A sessions for course participants. One of the course participants told Stacy,

*“This course has been the most helpful parenting material I’ve experienced. My natural tendency is to jump straight to coaching and correcting, only to feel frustrated when my words don’t produce the desired effect. I now think ‘safety first.’” - Will, Family pastor*

We also had over 600 families enrolled in the Covid offering of the ***Siblings: From Bickering To Bonding***. Course moderator Sarah reported, *“It was a great joy to engage with parents as they told real-time stories about how their kids were learning the joy of true reconciliation.”*

In early August we released a brand new course, ***The Power of Questions. Less Arguing. More Wisdom***. This course equips parents to use questions in a curious way to develop their kids' wisdom for challenges of all kinds. Course moderator Stacy engaged with the first cohort of over 200 parents and her early report is that parents are profoundly impacted. One mom said,

*“Like a small adjustment in posture can bring health and relief to the body, this course has given me some life-giving tweaks to interactions with my kids. I realized that many of my questions were manipulative or condemning in tone. This course has caused my questions to become a bridge to my kids’ hearts.”*

Our course, ***The Entitlement Fix - Growing Hard work and Gratitude***, is offered year round without moderation.

- **DTC Alumni Facebook Group:** We engage daily with parents on the DTC Alumni page, a group of 493 parents who have completed an online course and want active support from like-minded parents. Our team engages daily with this group to address parenting issues and refers them to applicable resources. Group moderator Sarah reports, *“It’s a blessing to see parents keep growing to put God’s grace into practice in daily life. I love the privilege of being their cheerleader and sometimes online coach.”*
- **Insider’s Team:** Over 600 parents have agreed to be members of our Insider’s Team. These parents both *receive* benefit and *add* benefit to the larger Connected Families community. Each Friday, Anna Braasch reaches out with a very specific request that requires very little time on the part of the Insider’s Team member. She reports, *“I am beyond encouraged by the Insider’s Team! This group puts their time and energy into growing the reach of Connected Families. Almost like a big Connected Family!”*
- **International Prospects and Partnership:** Over the past few years we have engaged in more conversations to make our resources known and available to an international audience.
  - **China** - Our two flagship books *How to Grow a Connected Family*, and *Discipline that Connects with Your Child’s Heart* are both translated into Chinese. The rough drafts are in various stages of preparedness for distribution. In China and in Canada there are communities of Chinese rallying around the teaching because it translates so well as an introduction to both sound parenting principles and the Gospel. We’re doing our best from afar to assure fidelity and sound legal process, and are eager to see how God will use these efforts to reach Chinese parents through Chinese partners.
  - **Canada** - We maintain a partnership with Family Life Canada to keep the Connected Families curriculum their main offering for parenting. We also have written for and have begun a content partnership with *IMPACTUS* (formerly Promise Keepers Canada).
  - **Indonesia** - Wycliffe missionaries have translated an online course into a local dialect and are training local parents to teach it.
  - **Australia** - Several groups have begun facilitating small groups and we’ll soon be conducting our first live (online) workshop with an Australian audience.
  - **Africa** - We have started conversations with leaders in Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania, and South Africa.
  - **Europe** - Similarly, we are in active conversations with leaders in Albania, Slovenia, and Germany.
  - We don’t *yet* have a strategic plan relative to these international conversations (except Canada and China), and are watching for vision and leadership to emerge from within those countries before committing to plans.

## Leaders Equipped

We are highly enthused by the new strategy to intentionally mentor others in the core principles and teaching methods.

- **Parent Coach Certification.** In May we launched our first coaching certification cohort of 5 future coaches, and in August launched the second cohort of the same size. This is intensive work with a small group in order to go deep in the mentorship, so that coaches can share the CF framework in their communities.

Of all the work we’re doing right now, this work to equip a growing cohort of certified coaches may be our most important. Staff member, Chad Hayenga, is leading this effort with a pastor’s heart to care for parents by imparting the essence of our ministry to this enthused community.

Chad reports: *“It’s so exciting to build into this group of passionate people and to see their hearts and skills develop. We already have a waiting list for the Spring cohort and I can see God using this effort and these*

*relationships to multiply God's grace in families by reaching many parents in places we just couldn't reach without these new coaches."*

- **25 parent coaches at New Life Family Services** (staff and volunteers) to more deeply integrate the Connected Families framework into their curriculum for new parents.
- **75 small groups launched** - small group leaders equipped with CF tools to lead groups in their churches. (Note: If you are in a small group we'd love to equip you similarly to take your group through one of our small group curriculum.)

## Covid Program Adjustments

During the early stages of Covid restrictions, we surveyed the Connected Families community to ask how we could best care for them. We received 1,000 responses within 36 hours. Respondents generally expressed gratitude, and told us: *"Keep doing what you're doing - with an emphasis on higher than usual anxiety and stress."* So we immediately made adjustments in our plans. We recognize that the changes we made (and keep making) are also preparation for a possibly very different future. A future that requires us to find new ways to be as "present" as we can with parents. We do this in light of the reality that gathering physically may not be prudent anytime soon.

In response to the results of our survey we made these significant and immediate program changes:

1. Assigned staff members to care quickly and personally to inquiries in each program area.
2. Produced short and personal videos to encourage, empathize, inspire, and equip parents for the practical realities of school changes, grieving children, ideas for activities, and how to keep a sense of God's presence in it all. These videos were converted to both podcasts and blog posts in order to be available to all learning styles.
3. Offered our "Sibling Conflict" online course for donations of any amount, accompanied by interactive online moderation with a couple of team members. Parents expressed high appreciation, characterized by this statement: *"Thank you SO MUCH for responding to my questions and giving me ideas for how to bring God's grace to my struggling kids. Learning to help my kids 'name and tame' their big emotions. We are learning to do this together and things are so much better."*
4. We created a four-part podcast series about a Christ-centered approach to anxiety.
5. Then we adjusted our entire content plan to offer relevant blog posts, podcasts, video encouragement, and social media posts to reflect the present issues faced by parents.

## Ministry Strengths

**Team Health:** Our team continues to grow healthier and more able to give our best energy to the goals and strategies we agree on together. We have retained all team members and added a couple more. We practice the principles for healthy relationships that we teach parents, and the result is a strong ability to face challenges together as a team.

**Ability to "pivot":** Due to the hard work we've done in order to serve thousands online through our web-presence, it was quite natural to shift our primary focus to caring for as many parents online as possible.

**Proven model:** The principles we teach are at once actionable, memorable, and lasting - *even applicable to the "new normal"*. The growing body of testimonials we receive attests to a rare efficacy among Christian parenting approaches.

**Clear goals and strategies:** We plan rigorously and work hard to stick to those plans. The plans both stretch us to keep improving, while staying realistic and attainable. This keeps our staff working purposefully and productively without major distraction so that care for parents can remain the priority. At the Q2 planning meeting in early April we effectively made doable plans with consideration for our new reality.

**Data-driven decision making:** This year we hired two part-time staff specializing in SEO (Search Engine Optimization) and Digital marketing. Each of these staff members study the impact of our online content in order to understand how that content most effectively reaches any parent seeking guidance. The ultimate goal is to guide any parent seeking Christian wisdom towards an email subscription. Once someone subscribes this is the most cost-effective way to get them resources, AND have full control of how much (or how little) they hear from us.

**Fiscal Health:** The ministry has operated with a positive cash-flow all but two of the past 18 years. This year, due to the final settlements from the sale of the child-welfare branch of our ministry, we are budgeting a loss in order to invest in the data-driven marketing positions we hired for as described above. Lord-willing, we are still projecting to end the year with the long-range goal to have a one-year operating reserve. The 2020 calendar year projected budget is currently on track to spend about \$680,000, while generating about \$600,000 in revenue. Full, audited financial statement available upon request to President Jim Jackson at [jjackson@connectedfamilies.org](mailto:jjackson@connectedfamilies.org)

**Board of Directors growth:** In order to keep growing toward a productive and relevant ministry well into the future, we are expanding our Board of Directors to include current end-user parents. Three passionate board members have recently joined the team and we are always watching for leadership to join us. If you are interested in learning more about board membership please email Executive Director Anna Braasch at [abraasch@connectedfamilies.org](mailto:abraasch@connectedfamilies.org)

## Challenges

**Higher than normal uncertainty:** Between Covid and economic issues, we feel less certain about how to best plan for the future. Scheduling has become a challenge as churches are unwilling to commit to future arrangements not knowing how or if regulations or budgets will change.

With regard to heightened racial tension we believe it prudent to consider the perceptions of our diverse audience more carefully than ever, and are currently seeking to add multi-cultural advisors to assure our messaging travels well across cultural lines.

**Online resources:** The internet is a gift during these times, but also a great challenge. It has become immediately and significantly over-run with online courses, experiences, and resources. Products must both stand out *and* be marketed well. We've enlisted expertise to find our way into this landscape but again, we just don't have a proven track record in such a landscape.

**Fundraising issues:** With the economy so fragile and so many jobs at risk, we have no idea what to expect in terms of long-term giving commitments. Our donor base has historically proven extremely faithful, with donor retention, of gifts of \$100 and above from year to year, over 80%. That said, enlisting new and sustaining donors remains extremely competitive.

**Succession planning:** First steps have been taken toward the succession of co-founders Jim & Lynne Jackson. They are still involved in all significant decisions and will be for the foreseeable future, but the team is working to gradually release Jim & Lynne from daily decision-making roles so they can focus on the most important aspects of leaving a strong legacy. Early steps seem effective but it's uncharted water, and the "best-practice" consultancy we've received doesn't quite fit our circumstances.

## Essential Programs and Funding Needs for 2021

Our preliminary expense budget for the year beginning Jan 1, 2021 is \$680,000. This will fund 11 employees (about 7.5 FTE) and all overhead. Of this total, we're projecting \$300,000 from suggested donations in exchange for ministry services or products, and \$380,000 from charitable giving. About \$200,000 of this comes from a combination of pledged monthly gifts and repeat annual giving. This leaves a **Remaining Funding Need of about \$180,000** by year-end to guide families as planned. In brief, here are the programs that rely on contributions, and their corresponding projected funding needs:

## Layer 1: Introductory Content Driven Outreach

- **Audio, video, and written Social Media driven resources.** The team will continue to create and produce additional written, audio, and video web resources for parents, that will also aid in marketing our coaching and speaking services. We continue to make all these resources available at no cost. **Remaining funding needed = \$30,000.**
- **General Operations.** As the organization grows, the cost of administering the business grows with it. Support staff, office management, and facility needs require upgrading in order to keep pace with the increase in ministry. **Remaining funding needed = \$35,000.**

## Layer 2: Impact Ministry

- **Full workshop schedule.** We project conducting 60 workshops with about 4000 parents. Cost to produce the workshops plan to reach 4000 parents at 60 workshops (average cost to produce = \$2000 per workshop). Even though it actually costs more to conduct quality real-time online learning experiences, churches seem biased toward spending less, leaving a **projected funding need of \$55,000.**
- **Training and developing certified CF Parent Coaches.** We've launched the first cohort and will launch two more in 2021. **Funding needed: \$30,000**
- **Online Course development and moderation.** We will continue to produce at least one high-quality, interactive, online course each year, run each of the four existing courses, and plan to assign a staff member to each cohort for the purpose of person-to-person engagement in the context of each running course. **Remaining funding needed = \$30,000**

As always, we are SO THANKFUL for the growing community of donors who give toward Kingdom impact through Connected Families. It's our highest priority to be good stewards of your care and generosity. **Please be prayerful about how or if to participate in the Connected Families year-end campaign** (details in weeks to come). To keep reaching more parents as planned requires about \$180,000 between now and Dec 31. If you have any questions or would like to connect to learn more or give input, please let us know.

With deep gratitude on behalf of  
those we serve,

*The Connected Families Team*



**P.S. Please consider in weeks to come how you might help fill the \$180,000 funding need to care for and equip families in 2021.**



10800 Old County Road 15, Suite 100 • Plymouth, MN 55341 • Ph: 952.448.3625