Generosity Impact

June 2024

by Tim Atkinson

My name is Tim Atkinson. I serve on the board of directors of the First English Lutheran Child Development Center, or FELCDC for short. Fellow board members include Merrily Porter, Erin McCracken, Anne Wiebe, and Monica Lund. Other board members are parents of children in the CDC.

The CDC is a First English ministry formed by dedicated church members in 1972. At that time, there was an increasing number of women entering the workforce and women going to college. This, in turn, created an exploding need for early childhood care and education.

The cost of such nurturing care, however, was beyond the reach of parents living in or on the edge in poverty. A year before, in Washington, both houses of Congress had passed a bipartisan bill that authorized and funded a national program to provide universal early childhood education, but the president vetoed the bill. Fortunately, First English did respond to the need, kept its word, and has done so ever since.

In the beginning, the idea was for the CDC to make use of some of the Sunday School classrooms in the Education Wing that otherwise remained dark and unused six days a week. Now, the Education wing has become the Child Development Center. Five days a week the classrooms, the fellowship hall, and the kitchen are ringing with the noises and voices of dozens of young children, teachers, and staff.

There are many stories we could share about founding members, directors, staff, around 1000 children, their parents, Boy Scout service projects, part-time employment of early education students, and more. These will have to wait for another time.

Like most nonprofit organizations with a tenure of more than fifty years, we, too, hit some rough patches. The worst was last year as the COVID pandemic began to wane, and we had to suspend operation.

At the direction of the Church Council, we regrouped and restarted operations, all while maintaining our license. We also took the opportunity to make needed repairs, improvements, and energy-saving upgrades to the CDC wing and to the fellowship hall, thanks to the direction, service, and assistance of Terry Porter and Heidi Goebel.

Our cherished Child Development Center is in operation. Children are playing and learning. There is a waiting list. And we are growing.

Our new director is Dr. Paulette Clemons. She came to us with outstanding experience in child development and early childhood education. She has hired a stellar group of teachers and a kitchen manager.

There is no doubt that the center meets a need. That need has been highlighted by our decision to start offering infant care. Today, after just opening in April, the infant room is nearly full, and more are coming. First English continues its promise to provide safe, loving, and engaging childcare.

Despite the benefits of our nonprofit status, a rent-free building, volunteers, and benevolent gifts, tuition alone does not pay the bills for this ministry of our church. Scholarships still are needed for us to make ends meet and to continue to provide help for those that require it. Grants still are needed for foster children and recent immigrants. Without financial assistance, we could serve only the affluent.

Early childhood education and care remain significant issues in our nation, in Texas, and in the Austin area. As one congregation member said, "The First English Child Development Center really does offer something wonderful, and I think we would all like to see it continue to grow and be a sustained ministry of this church."

On behalf of the board and the families and staff, please consider the commitment of this community to the Child Development Center. Pray for our center. Consider how you might support the center with your own time and talent. The CDC is one of our FELC benevolence partners this year; please keep that in mind as you plan your giving of financial resources. And as the Holy Spirit moves you, talk with me or another board member to fund or contribute to a scholarship or an endowment.

Tim Atkinson