UNIVERSITY of DUBUQUE
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

PLENTIFUL GIFTS

Nourishing Members for the Flourishing of Small Member Congregations

Welcome Friends!



P L E N T I F U L G I F T S

Nourishing Members for the Flourishing of Small Member Congregations

WELCOME!

A Circle of Clay Pots Overflowing with God's Gifts

- *Cohort 1:*
- *National Association of Congregational Christian Churches*
- *Presbytery of East Iowa*
- *Presbytery of Utica*
- *Cohort 2:*
- *Presbytery of Southern Kansas*
- *Presbytery of John Knox*
- *Presbytery of Plains and Peaks*

Shifting from the Pastor-centric model

- Instead of putting all eggs in the basket of delegating church renewal to one paid pastor or staff person,

  this model aims to share church practices across the body of Christ.
- In this a pastoral leader or paid staff person may join a community approach,

  but not bear sole or primary responsibility for church life.
- The full membership is strengthened to “be church” without heavy dependency on staff.
- Members find their interests fed and their confidence built in exercising cherished church practices.
- And *if* there are any paid staff or clergy among the leadership (CRE, volunteer, retired, bi-vocational, circuit riding…), they will not be exhausted and needed to heavily “run the church.”

Forest Walk Consulting LLC

Serving Small Churches

UDTS

Hope Care Teach Preach Lead Admin Theology



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Forest Walk Consulting LLC

Serving Small Churches

The landscape is changing
for how churches live and grow

We have the opportunity to…

lean forward in hope and curiosity

UDTS, your seminary partner in thriving; we pledge:

- Building relationships – we will support individuals in encouragement, and in developing networks of congregations in your presbytery on the journey together
- Cultivating gifts in people of all backgrounds - for faith and church practices
- Creating nurture - for particular interests, hopes, needs, and strengths
- Stewarding resources - offering a wide range of additional tools for your toolbox – along with celebrating the ones already in your church and presbytery
- Relevance - our evangelism/mission department focuses on flexible forms of church, with awareness of these times and different communities
- We value and are committed to smaller and grassroots churches
- We are eager to share learning with you, and to learn from you
- We are becoming practiced in stewarding Lilly Endowment funds!

A Network of 4-7 Congregations in Your Presbytery

Your catalyst will help your presbytery design a process to discern congregations that are a good match for this opportunity (e.g. maybe an open application process; or invitations)

The number of congregations is flexible – aim for a number that makes a meaningful circle, with each benefitting adequately from your catalyst, and the budget for mentors and nurture programming (retreats, book studies, speakers)

Regardless of size or budget of participating churches - it is recommended to select congregations eager to lean in to learn and grow in order to grow from the opportunity and resources. (For example, this program does not provide conflict mediation or trauma recovery or decisions on property.)


Hospice
Striving
Conflict
Thriving


Hospice
Striving
Conflict
Thriving

Process and Timeline

Stepping Stones - Now until Next Summer

- Fall 2026
  - Presbytery identifies or invites and confirm participating congregations
  - Presbytery - with UDTS - identify and contract with Catalyst and Mentors, ideally within their bounds
- Fall or winter 2026-7
  - Kick off celebration(s) and worship planned by Mentors and Catalysts for each church
  - Kick off retreat for the participating churches in presbytery, planned by Catalysts working with program Director and Mentors (adapted within your budgeted funds)
- Spring 2027
  - Explore and name your “plentiful gifts” - your neighborhood context, church unique identity, the giftedness of your members. This is called the “ Mirror and Windows” process. Out of these conversations, areas of church practices to focus on are named, and a menu of nurture choices is developed. Your Catalyst works with Forest Walk Consulting and the program Director for this exploration and discernment.
- Summer 2027
  - Plan offerings fit your commitments and needs best. Examples might be a Bible study or book study, or a retreat for your church, or inviting a leader for a sermon series related to a church practice that is important to your church. Or maybe you will host a neighborhood event, or contribute to a workshop as part of a presbytery gathering. Lilly funds resource these opportunities that fit you best.

Stepping Stones – Second Year

- Fall 2027
  - Your presbytery's participating churches have another retreat with three or four representatives each, sharing encouragement and resources, worship and fellowship.
- Fall 2027
  - By now your churches are enjoying some of the offerings you selected for nurture and growth – book groups, classes, workshops, speakers, etc.
- January or February 2028
  - Another retreat for interested representatives provides a time for refreshment, fellowship, celebrating discoveries.
- Spring 2028
  - Congregations continue to cultivate gifts through selected offerings that feed the areas of church practice in which you are thirsty or deeply committed
- Summer or fall 2028
  - A closing retreat with several representatives from each congregation provides a protected time to celebrate, look ahead, tell the story of your church
-

First Month

Welcome

Six Months

Mirror & Windows studies

Eighteen Months

Strengthening the body of Christ

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Welcome → *Mirrors & Windows* → *Nourishment around the Table*

Identify Participants

Preliminary survey of your gifts

Gatherings of members

Discern your gifts and thirsts with Forest Walk

Be encouraged in an initial retreat

Develop a Menu to feed your Interests

Enjoy selected nurture offerings

Mentors encourage churches in nurture offerings

8 month retreat

15 month retreat

18 month retreat

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Serving Small Churches

Catalyst Ministry Description

- Catalysts support encouragement and relationships in your presbytery
- Your catalyst bridges between the Director/consultants/seminary - and the presbytery, participating congregations, and Mentors through scheduled meetings, milestone events, and regular communication
- Your catalyst develops with the presbytery ways by which to discern the participating congregation.
- Your catalyst works with the presbytery to identify congregational Mentors to encourage and shepherd churches in the journey.
- The catalyst will help mentors build the menu of nurture options based on the thirsts and strengths you identify in your “Mirrow and Windows” exploration
- The catalyst will provide leadership for planning, budgets, supporting mentors

Mentors

- *Are geographically, or relationally, close to the church*
- *Have or gain a deep understanding of history, the community, your hopes*
- *Have relevant gifts (such as a coach, director, pastor, administrator)*
- *Shepherd with heart through change and trying new things*
- *Are able to support congregations through choosing and scheduling their menu choices*
- *Engage twice monthly with the congregation – in a visit and/or other touchpoints*
- *Meet monthly with the Catalyst, other Mentors, and/or seminary partners*

Mirrors & Windows (Six Months)

Looking in the mirror
at the congregation's members, spiritual gifts, resources;
Looking out the window to the neighborhood and wider community

Elements:

- *Relationships in your church, identity, vocation, & mission*
- *Demographic/context summaries to give mentors insights*
- *The congregation pinpoints their gifts and thirsts*
- *Discernment of individual interests are surfaced for nurture*
- *Creation of the church's custom menu of nurture offerings*

Strengthening the body of Christ (18 Months)

Seven fields of nurture to strengthen churches

- *Three or more people from each church are nurtured in each of the four practices identified*
- *You may have individuals from different churches learning in common areas together for wider company*
- *Or you may have targeted opportunities among several people within one church for focused interests.*
- *Some training options might allow for broad congregational involvement- for example, a book group on caring.*

The members grow in faith, confidence and joy

Nurture Fields of Study – "Menu Selections"

(You will choose four after reflecting on your unique church and gifts,
for which at least three people are nurtured in each,
Though not more than two topics per person;
Ideally a minimum of six church members engage in offerings
during your time in Plentiful Gifts – the more who do, the richer the experience

1. ***Preaching – study and sharing*** *(required if you don't have supply)*
2. ***Worship leadership***
3. ***Care for one another*** *(required if a means is not in place)*
4. ***Community & service***
5. ***Faith formation***
6. ***Leadership & governance*** *(required if missing in your church)*
7. ***Communication & technology***



Equip the whole church
by
Strengthening the body
and
Creating community