

National Association of Congregational Christian Churches Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies Dean's Report 2019-2020

Before the Separatists in Leiden, the Netherlands, departed on the *Mayflower* on their journey that would bring them to North America, their pastor, John Robinson, preached a sermon to those preparing to leave that has been recalled often and fondly throughout 400 years of Congregational history, which included the guidance: *"I charge you before God and his blessed angels that you follow me no further than you have seen me follow Christ. If God reveal anything to you by any other instrument of His, be as ready to receive it as you were to receive any truth from my ministry, for I am verily persuaded the Lord hath more truth and light yet to break forth from His holy word."*

For students who are part of the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies (CFTS), the call and direction of God is tested and expanded through the instruction of seminary faculty, the wisdom of clergy mentors, the academic support of CFTS leadership, the spiritual encouragement of Pilgrim Partners, and many gifts given by many others. The financial support of churches and individual donors through scholarships and other contributions to CFTS, historically and ongoing, enable all of this illumination to take place. It is recognized that God's truth and light on the educational journey break forth in many ways, and all of these are important for the formation for ministry and the development of critical skills.

Since June 2019, CFTS students have progressed to follow Christ toward various places and points in their pilgrimages.

- Joel Boyd and Joy Matos graduated from CFTS in June 2019. Joel is Senior Minister of the First Congregational Church of Marshfield, Massachusetts, and Joy is serving the Union Congregational Church in Wollaston, Massachusetts.
- Ed Gabrielsen, who is set to graduate from both Perkins School of Theology in Dallas, Texas, and CFTS this June 2020, has spent the past year doing his supervised ministry with the Rockland Congregational Church in Rockland, Maine, working with the church's Senior Minister, the Rev. Seth Jones.
- Jacob Richards, completing his second year at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, is finishing his first of two years of student ministry at the Olivet Congregational Church, in Olivet, Michigan, with the Rev. Mark McCormick as his ministerial supervisor.
- A Boston Seminar in Congregational History and Polity was facilitated from July 28-August 2, 2019, with Jacob Richards taking part as a CFTS student, and many others also joining the endeavor in learning about Congregationalism, past and present, including clergy called to Congregational churches who were ordained in other traditions, graduates of the Lay Ministry Training Program, and lay members of Congregational churches.
- Amory Jewett was interviewed and admitted as a CFTS student and is attending the Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan.

It is clear that CFTS remains a vital component to the educational ministry of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches as it offers the necessary academic, financial, and spiritual elements to help seminary students become well-shaped ministers of our churches upon graduation. With the Lay Ministry Training Program undergoing significant transformation, aspects of the CFTS model of nurturing future ministers of our churches is informing the discussion of structure and curriculum. Further, the position of CFTS in relationship to the Center for Congregational Leadership (CCL) is being discussed by the CCL Task Team.

The thought, effort, and generosity of many keep CFTS receptive to God's movement in students' and churches' lives. Members of the CFTS Committee, the Rev. Tom Van Tassell, Chairperson, the Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Bingham, and the Revs. Mike Fales, Doug Gray, William Lange, Phyllis Merritt, and Justin Nierer, seek counsel together on how CFTS discerns God's unfolding revelation on its mission. Several churches and individuals give grants, scholarships, and donations that have immediate effect on the quality of the educational experience for CFTS students.

What also makes a crucial difference in our entire Association is when clergy or members of churches identify those among their fellowships, of any age or stage of life, who may have a curiosity about a call to ministry or demonstrate capabilities that would be of benefit in the ordained leadership of our churches. We need to affirm and recognize these as God potentially revealing truth and light for the blessing of our Congregational Way, so please reach out via phone (1-800-262-1620, extension 1613) or email (drcapacker@gmail.com) if you have questions or would like more information.

In readiness with you to receive God's truth and light for our students, our churches, and for the Congregational Way, Rev. Dr. Charles A. Packer, Dean, Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies