

CONGREGATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

FY2022

Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians 15:22 that “all will be made alive in Christ.” While there is still a clear difference between the way in which many of us, our churches, and our various Congregational associations are functioning now compared to pre-March 2020, the fact that there is an in-person meeting of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches this year seems to be evidence of at least some significant ground being regained.

It is perhaps no accident that the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies (CFTS) operates under the broader umbrella of the work of the Vitality Ministry Council, as the mission of CFTS is to generate new ministry for our churches and therefore bring about the hope that comes from resurrection life. CFTS advances toward that goal by providing academic, financial, and spiritual support for seminary students who are pursuing their calls to seminary education in order to become ministers among our churches. The Boston Seminar in Congregational History and Polity, a supervised ministry requirement, attendance at Annual Meetings and Conferences, Ministers’ Convocations, Congregational Symposia, and the regular interaction with a Pilgrim Partner mentor all contribute toward this end. The signs of this new, resurrection life in the past year witnessed through the CFTS program are plentiful:

- Two new students, Joseph Leggett, Director of Youth and Family Ministries at the First Congregational Church of Spencer, Iowa, and Sally Redondo Padilla, a member of the First Church of Squantum, Massachusetts, have been admitted into CFTS. Both are enrolled in distance learning programs: Joseph with the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa, and Sally with Payne Theological Seminary in Wilberforce, Ohio.
- Inquiries from prospective students have led to two individuals currently in the process of completing applications.
- For the first time in a number of years, CFTS students were able to attend the Midwest Ministers’ Convocation, May 2-5, 2022, at the Weber Center in Adrian, Michigan. A possibly record-breaking three students were present, establishing connections with other NACCC clergy, offering insightful and meaningful devotional experiences, and taking in several sessions exploring the contemporary value of engaging the Psalms.

With the possibility of more safe, in-person gatherings, there are some critical events and initiatives on the horizon to further demonstrate the vibrancy that CFTS offers our National Association:

- At the Annual Meeting and Conference in Wichita, Kansas, in June 2022, the Rev. Ed Gabrielsen, Senior Minister of the Searsport First Congregational Church in Searsport, Maine, will be officially recognized as a CFTS graduate during the Sunday morning worship and communion service.
- A Boston Seminar in Congregational History and Polity will occur for the first time since 2019, July 31-August 5, 2022. Three CFTS students and clergy recently called to serve our churches from other faith traditions will participate in lectures, discussions, and guided research on topics related to Congregational history, governance, ministerial practice, ethics, and other matters.
- Two students are preparing to begin supervised ministries in NACCC churches in the fall of 2022.
- The circle of Pilgrim Partners is being expanded to develop spiritual mentoring relationships between existing NACCC clergy and CFTS students.
- Plans are underway to reach out to a number of seminaries to promote CFTS among students who are not currently affiliated with a particular denomination or organization.

- Discussions are being initiated between the Mission and Outreach Ministry Council and CFTS to promote awareness and mutually-beneficial support of NACCC-sponsored missions by seminary students.

These activities are invigorated by numerous individuals and groups. The CFTS Committee, made up of the Rev. Jacob Poindexter, Chairperson, the Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Bingham, and the Revs. Mike Fales, Doug Gray, William Lange, Phyllis Merritt, and Justin Nierer, is a body that breathes wisdom, encouragement, and fresh ideas into CFTS and its endeavors. In addition, the scholarships, donations, and supervised ministry opportunities provided by so many dedicated people and churches perpetuates the cycle of instruction, practice, and service that are at the core of CFTS. Thanks to everyone who has shared in the ongoing and life-giving processes that CFTS fosters.

Joining you in making our Association ever alive in Christ,
Rev. Dr. Charles A. Packer
Dean, Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies