



God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. (1 Peter 4:10)

Plentiful Gifts

A Unique Ministry Growth
Program for Smaller
Churches

University of Dubuque
Theological Seminary

National Association of
Congregational Christian
Churches



Overview

- Is your congregation struggling to maintain worship, pastoral care, and community life with fewer helping hands?
- Does your ministry feel less "full" because your church is served by a part-time pastor?
- Like most mainline denominations, NACCC churches are increasingly served by part-time clergy
- This trend will accelerate over the next 10-20 years
- Long-term vitality of congregational Christian tradition depends on multiple models of ministry



Shifting from the Pastor-Centric Model

- Instead of putting all eggs in the basket of delegating church renewal to one paid pastor, this model aims to distribute ministry across the body of Christ.
- A pastoral leader may join this team approach, but doesn't bear sole responsibility for the life and service of the congregation.
- By adding laypeople to the ministry team, the local church can multiply their capacity to serve while living out their belief in the “priesthood of all believers”



Shared Ministry in the Congregational Way

- Return to our Congregationalist-Christian roots with a strong tradition of lay participation
- In the body of Christ, laity and clergy have spiritual gifts in differing measure, but all are spiritual equals, and as members have “rights, powers, and privileges equal to those of every other.” (Henry Martyn Dexter, *A Hand-Book of Congregationalism*, 1880)
- At times, “priesthood of all believers” has meant laity have at times
 - stepped into the pulpit to preach
 - delivered communion to shut-ins
 - led the prayers in worship
 - presided over the Lord’s Supper
 - conducted baptisms
 - responded to other pastoral needs and duties

(Mauro, *Art and Practice*, 2019)



Introducing “Plentiful Gifts”

- Partnership between NACCC and University of Dubuque Theological Seminary
- Grant Funded: Lilly Endowment for 2 year training and mentoring program
- Free-to-Participate
 - No program, consulting or tuition cost to churches
 - Grants for retreats, travel, materials are budgeted



“Plentiful Gifts” Program Goals

- Encourage local congregations to meet the needs of their community through flourishing lay-led ministry
- Enhance your congregation's vitality
- Identify under-recognized and under-utilized resources in the local congregation
- Grow in service to one another
- Sustain small-but-vital congregations with part-time clergy
- Explore new ministry models
- Nurture the gifts and talents of lay people



How it Works

1. Application, selection and congregational approval
2. Work with the Plentiful Gifts team to explore your congregation's:
 - Identity
 - Community
 - Challenges
 - Ministry gifts
3. A small group (3-4 people) then receives training and support
 - Training areas: preaching, worship, pastoral care, faith formation, community engagement, leadership



How it Works

- Each church receives a mentor
- Biannual gatherings for worship, fellowship, and encouragement
- Participants support each other through prayer
- Two-year commitment
 - Six-month study phase followed by 18 months of tailored learning
 - No cost to participate thanks to the Lilly Endowment's Thriving Congregations Initiative
- Recruitment phase - 4-7 churches selected



Program Schedule

Fall 2024

6 months

18 months

Recruitment

“Windows and
Doors”

“Equipping”

- Discuss with Congregational Leadership
- Complete Application

- Discern identity, mission and gifts
- Work with program director, catalyst and consultants

- Selected members participate in theological education, workshops and mentoring
- Congregation offers support and encouragement



Windows and Doors Phase

Looking inward and outward (consultant and mentor-supported)

- Assessing congregation's members, spiritual gifts, resources
- Examining the neighborhood and other context
- Exploring: relationships, identity, vocation, & mission
- Analyzing demographic/contextual study results
- Identifying gaps and bridges
- Discerning individual calls for training (3-4 people)
- Creating the congregation's strengthening/equipping plan



Equipping Phase: Growing in faith, wisdom, and calling

Participants (3-4 per congregation)

- Cohort style training
- Training options: broad congregational equipping (e.g., book group on caring)
- Seven individual fields of equipping to strengthen churches:
 - Preaching
 - Worship leadership
 - Pastoral Care
 - Community & Service
 - Faith Formation
 - Leadership & Governance
 - Communication & Technology



Additional Supports

Support from fellow churches, the Plentiful Gifts Team, and the NACCC

Kick-off/Site Visit with NACCC Team and Church Consultants

Monthly meetings with mentor and program manager

Virtual and In-Person Retreats for Participants



Thank You!

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