

2026 Vitality Ministry Council Annual Report

Rev. Robb Tarr, Chair, Vitality Ministry Council

2025-26 has been a year of seeing different aspects of the responsibilities of the Vitality Ministry Council progress through different stages. Thanks to our members Julie Sheridan-Smith, Chris Surber, and Mark Tanner for the thoughtfulness and creativity that required. Also, a special thanks to Laura Francisco, who is stepping down from the Council this year but made strong contributions in financial tracking and brainstorming for our various projects. Ambitious work also necessitates exceptional support, and we got that in all kinds of ways, especially from Laura Wright, Maggie Helmick, Cheryl Milnes, and Gerry Krupp.

We were pleased to again be able to offer Sharing Vitality Grants to churches across the country that are starting up or expanding ministry projects that enable a holistic experience of vitality in their churches and communities. Grantees this year are making a difference through relational and resource-providing ministries, as well as creative approaches to community. Our goal is for this program to ripple across the NA not only through more applicants in the future, but also through collaborative conversations when we're inspired by each other, so please do check out our report and the regular features Maggie Helmick is sharing of grantees.

Another NA program we track and support that is fostering innovative and hopeful models of ministry is the Plentiful Gifts fellowship. Participating churches have engaged in lots of resources throughout the year and even special programs during the AMC. These insights can be shared amongst all of us, so I hope you'll consider seeking out conversations.

We had our largest contingent of participants for convocation in recent memory as we returned to Mundelein in our national meeting model of the last few years. The event fostered great fellowship amongst clergy and also was able to balance offerings of devotional and practical content that was well received. We will continue in future years to prioritize accessibility for participants and applicability of content as much as possible.

A couple of years ago, inspired by content at the Annual Meeting, we began offering a Leaders Table cohort program in partnership with Alan Roxburgh that has lasted as a Companions Table with deep relationships and impact facilitated by Julie Sheridan-Smith and Maggie Helmick. We hope to continue to convene groups of mutual support and formation like this in the future, so keep an eye out for more opportunities to participate.

We are very proud to support the work of the Lay Ministry Training Program and Congregational Fellowship for Theological Studies. LMTP has done great work in the transition from being an exciting start-up to a strong, sustaining program that has been solidifying its structures and continuing to produce graduates who make a significant impact in our churches! This is a great program to recommend participants for and to support!

The CFTS board has been refreshing this year with a particular eye towards evolving its patterns of support to meet the changing circumstances of who is now most commonly pursuing

seminary education and professional ministry. We're confident these efforts will be impactful for aspiring clergy and the churches they will serve.

As we look ahead to the coming year, we continue to hold as our priorities identifying resources for and creating connections between clergy and churches for the thriving of members as the NA together. As part of this, we encourage all members to take advantage of every grant and award program we and other councils offer, which have seen fewer nominations lately. We also have been getting offers to support our Council, and ideas for the types of programs you would find most helpful, and we want to hear even more. We'll seek to provide every opportunity we can.