

CALLED TO LIVES OF MEANING AND PURPOSE INITIATIVE

2020 COORDINATION PLAN

Overview

In the third year of the *Called to Lives of Meaning and Purpose Initiative*, we invite hub team members to learn and evaluate their work together through several opportunities. Hub team members can join a peer group, participate in a book discussion group on innovation, and attend a school on how to coach congregations; some participants will form a seminar on communal callings and two hubs will begin exploring resources for African American congregations. These opportunities are *optional*, and we invite you to participate in ways that best serve your project.



1. Peer Groups

The first opportunity is to join a peer group that focuses broadly on themes of *koinōnia* (partnership) and communal callings, with special emphasis on what we are learning from congregations as they engage their projects on calling. Our aim is to gather insights from the 70 congregations across the 13 programs, to share strategies, and engage in evaluative learning.¹ We have designed four modules for the peer groups:

Module 1: Partnering in Common Mission. The purpose of the first module is to become acquainted with each other's projects, how the pandemic has impacted the congregations and hubs, and each hubs' plans for 2020.

Module 2: Congregational Projects on Calling. In the second module participants will describe and analyze their congregations' projects on calling.

Module 3: Discerning a Communal, Shared Calling. The purpose of module 3 is to explore how communities experience and discern God's callings and how communal callings intersect with individual callings.

Module 4: Community Partners. The purpose of this module is to examine the kinds of partnerships congregations are creating, how they discern this work and what impact it has on them and their partners.

¹ The churches are in 36 U.S. states, Washington DC, and three Canadian provinces and represent at least 32 Christian traditions or denominations.

The modules are structured in a similar way to the ones on innovation in 2019. We will offer pre-meeting work that consists of short readings and a scripture reflection prepared by Jane Patterson; we offer discussion questions for the meeting as well as resources related to the theme. We are highlighting resources from the hubs and congregations.

We want each peer group to give direction to their work, which may include taking up other topics and determining how they want to learn (e.g., writing case studies, sharing other readings or resources, inviting feedback about a plan, event, or evaluation findings). Members of the coordination team will serve not as leaders but as guides and note-takers. Our aim is to gather the findings across the peer groups for our annual meeting in December.

According to a study of clergy peer groups, “covenanted learning that takes place in environments structured to maximize decision making and participation, promote challenge and safety, and foster spiritual, intellectual, vocational, and/or personal growth... are especially promising.”

Harewood, Brenda K., et al. *So Much Better: How Thousands of Pastors Help Each Other Thrive*, Christian Board of Publication, 2013.

We will form peer groups that will consist of:

- 4-5 participants from different hubs with a coordination team member²; we recommend that at least one representative from each hub participate in a peer group
- meeting at least three times via a 75-minute Zoom call, beginning in June and extending over the summer and fall
- with one participant serving as the leader for each meeting

Three peer groups will be for project directors, some particularly focused on the research they are conducting in the congregations.³

Small groups, according to L. Dee Fink, “can create powerful kinds learning—about the subject, the problem-solving process, oneself, working with others, and cross-cultural awareness.”⁴ This is especially the case now, in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, as the hubs are having to redesign their work for the coming year and respond to congregations under much distress.

² In 2019, hub team members shared that they would prefer small groups with the same participants rather than the group changing participants for each meeting, as they did in the 2019 modules.

³ One opportunity to present the research is the Baylor Symposium on Faith and Culture: Living Accountably. Darin Davis, project director, of Baylor’s hub has invited us to consider presenting at the Symposium, which is being held October 29-31, 2020.

⁴ L. Dee Fink, *Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses* (Jossey-Bass, 2003) 21.

2. Seminar on Communal Callings

One of the main goals of the coordination is to create resources for people in congregations. Over the past year, we have received requests from hub leaders seeking resources on how congregations discern a communal calling, on callings for people and congregations of color, and on the relationship between clergy and lay callings. Other themes will undoubtedly emerge but in this year, we are focusing primarily on the first two through different strategies.

The first is to create a seminar with participants from the hub teams, and outside experts as needed, to work on the creation of resources related to communal calling. We will first gather insights from the peer groups as well as initiate research on the theology and practice of communal calling and discernment. The seminar will consider several questions:

- In what ways do congregations experience and articulate a communal calling? What practices do they engage to discern that calling?
- What is a theological understanding of communal calling? How do communal and individual callings relate?
- How is communal calling related to and distinct from the congregation's calling?
- What are the practices of discerning a communal calling that would be helpful to congregations?
- What kinds of resources do congregations need and what can we create?

It is our hope that the seminar will be able to design, create, and test some resources in the next few years. We also know that there is not one resource to be created; rather, the groups may envision multiple types of resources. In that case, they may need additional expertise from people outside the group, such as a curriculum expert or visual artist. The first gathering of the Seminar will take place in the next year where we can identify a plan and process for working together.

3. Resources for Persons and Congregations of Color

The second strategy for developing resources has emerged with the two African American hubs. Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference would like to examine the resources they have created for African American congregations in the past and determine which ones could be published or shared online in order to reach broader audiences. American Baptist College would like to explore how to develop resources from their undergraduate program SEAL (social justice, equity, advocates, leadership) and connect them to congregations.

Other hubs are also interested in resources for Latinx and Asian-American communities. We will discern in the coming year how best to approach this work across the hubs.

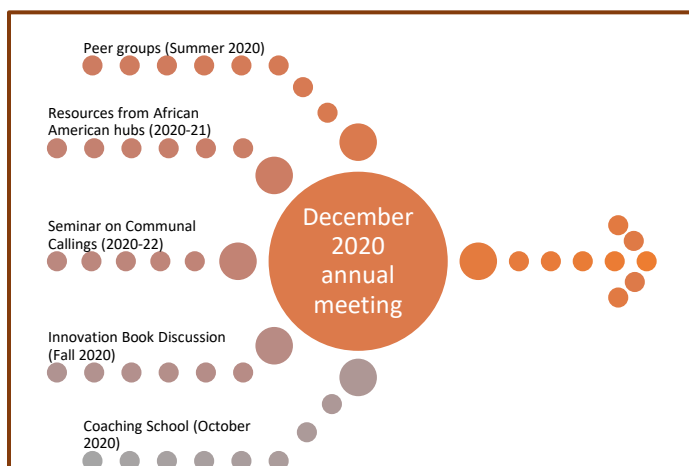
4. Book discussion group on innovation

Several hub participants are interested in continuing to learn about innovation and to that end we will form book groups to discuss Scott Cormode's new book on innovation: *The Innovative*

Church: How Leaders and Their Congregations Can Adapt in an Ever-Changing World (Baker Academic, September 15, 2020). The discussion groups will take place online in fall 2020.

5. Training for Coaches in Congregations

Vibrant Faith will offer their training school in October 2020 in two parts: the first part for new participants and the second part for new as well as the 2019 participants. Due to the pandemic, this training opportunity will be hosted online rather than in Collegeville. Vibrant Faith is also offering the training [August 15-19, 2020](#) in Glenview, Illinois, which will be open to our participants.



Through these five opportunities we hope to prepare hub teams to work effectively with their congregations. Our efforts this year will culminate in our annual meeting where we can share our initial research and findings from the peer groups, insights into communal calling as well as innovation, and the initial resources available from Proctor Conference and ABC.

In conclusion, Etienne Wenger in his book, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, reframes learning in a way that undergirds our efforts in 2020. By engaging participants through peer groups, seminars, book discussion groups, and a coaching school, we want participants to learn what will be important for their lives, for the churches they serve, and the organizations for which they work.

“For individuals, it means that learning is an issue of engaging in and contributing to the practices of their communities. For communities, it means that learning is an issue of refining their practice and ensuring new generations of members. For organizations, it means that learning is an issue of sustaining the interconnected communities of practice through which an organization knows what it knows and thus becomes effective and valuable as an organization.”

Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998) 7-8.