

Called to Lives of Meaning and Purpose Initiative
Annual Meeting 2021
Pre-Meeting Work

Creative Callings: Boston University School of Theology

1. **Report on hub activities** – Create a video, audio, or written document that:
 - Lists hub activities you **hosted** in 2021 and hope to do in 2022, including dates if known

2021

Our 2021 hub gatherings kicked off on March 6, 2021 with an All Hub Gathering. The theme was “Communal Care: Resources and Practices.” The gathering began with three faculty members from our leadership team leading workshops on practices for communal care. Participants chose a breakout room on one of the practices:

- Caring for the BodySpirit through Slow Yoga – Dr. Courtney Goto
- Voices of Wisdom: Nurturing and Sustaining Leadership in These Times – Rev. Dr. Wanda Stahl
- Ignatian Spirituality and Discernment: The Examen – Dr. Claire Wolfeich

The whole group came back together for two “lightning talks,” wherein two congregations shared about an adaptive challenge they were facing in their project work. The rest of the participants listened generously and then shared probing questions and stimulating ideas in response. The Hub time closed with participants going into small groups to share updates and get feedback on their project work.

This year, we also started a “coffee/lunch hour” in the month or two following the All Hub Gatherings—an optional time for Creative Callings teams to connect with each other and our leadership team and continue to be resourced. On May 6, 2021 we hosted our first Creative Callings Coffee Hour-- a casual, facilitated time to for congregations to strategize together on a key challenge or question they were facing in your project work. We asked them to come prepared to share for 3-5 minutes about a particular question or challenge in their project work, and the rest of the group listened and shared insights and feedback.

Our second All Hub Gathering was on October 2, 2021, around the theme “Shared Loss, Resilience, and Re-Sourcing.” Our team’s research fellows created a video to share back quotes from the congregations over the previous year on experiences of loss and resilience. [You can view the video, made by Boston University School of Theology student Laura Montoya \(MDiv\), here.](#) Another student, Allegra Fletcher (MTS), wrote a musical response to the words of the congregations, and this was quite moving for the congregations to be so deeply heard. In fact, one of the congregations asked Allegra to share the song at their Sunday worship service.

During this hub event, we also invited participants into small group reflection time on their experiences of shared loss and resilience, which led to deep, connecting, and vulnerable congregations. We closed our time by giving the congregational teams time to work on their project proposals for Year 3.

Our final gathering of the year was our Creative Callings Lunch Hour on October 25, 2021. It included a prayer time and an opportunity for participants to workshop their Year 3 proposals. This casual gathering in between full hub events seems quite fruitful in providing hospitable space, specific input on congregations' work, and an opportunity for congregational leaders to resource one another's work. For example, during this October Lunch Hour conversation, one of the pastors shared with another how useful their Virtual Faith coaching has been in their congregational discernment. This led the other congregation to build in funds for coaching in their Year 3 proposal.

2022

In 2022, we have five gatherings planned thus far:

- All Hub Gathering (Spring 2022)
- All Hub Gathering (Fall 2022)
- Three optional coffee hours/workshops for continued connection and resourcing of hub congregations

We will continue our support for congregations, with each faculty on the leadership team serving as a liaison to one of our hub congregations and facilitating connections such that congregations also partner to support one another

In addition, the upcoming year will be very important for research and resource-building as we aim to distill, analyze, and disseminate the critical learning of the hub during these unusual times. We have incorporated both masters and doctoral students on our team for this work. It is a joy to see their unique gifts nurtured in and contributing to the work of the hub as they learn alongside our congregations.

What is one point of discernment for your hub heading into 2022? (A sentence or two response is fine. We will spend time discussing the issues raised during the meeting.)

Our Creative Callings hub is discerning how to best further and deepen our work in this next critical phase, especially to support our congregations in their diverse situations, disseminate the deep learning of this unique time, and make distinctive contributions consonant with our own callings. Related to this, we are discerning how our hub can best prepare congregations to think about sustainability—spiritual, financial, and leadership--as the grant moves into the next phase and as many in leadership are exhausted and facing shortages of volunteers.

2. **Report on congregation activities** – Imagine you are talking with a congregational leader from a church who wants to learn how a vocational lens can serve congregational life. The frameworks of calling, meaning, and purpose are new to them. Create a video, audio, or written document that:

Tell a story of calling and discernment from one of your current congregations and / or one of their members.

One of our congregations has been in a very thoughtful process about the future of the small congregation—and this past year, their communal discernment practices led them to a decision to begin the process of closing their church. Here is some of their story:

Over the course of our discernment, our Creative Callings team was asked to consider our sustainability as our congregation, and our resources, particularly related to questions of thriving - what would be most life-giving for our congregation and for our community. Our team determined, after careful thought and prayerful reflection that our congregation is not sustainable, and that it would be more life-giving for our folks, and for our community, if individuals found new church homes where they could engage their gifts, where they could find rest, and also receive the gifts of others in community together, and if we stewarded our resources toward the needs expressed in our community and in the world.

The congregation, in a vote of 10-1, voted for the leadership team to formulate a plan for closing. We are still not entirely certain what this will mean - whether the congregation will dissolve and redistribute our assets, or whether we will merge with another entity and redistribute our assets in new and creative ways through that merger. Either way, our congregation will no longer meet as it has for the past 165 years, and much of our building will likely change in form and use. Because we trust that God's spirit is a part of our discernment, we trust that through our faithful work, something life-giving and good will come - because our God is always doing new things toward life-giving goodness; even beyond death, God brings about the possibility of new life. Our leadership team will continue in its thoughtful discernment and honing of call - determining a path forward that maintains the legacy of our church community, presence and mission, and that also meets the needs of our community as best we are able.

Describe how their efforts on calling and discernment could be adapted in the leader's congregation.

While the story of a congregation closing may seem negative and demoralizing, this story in fact holds great seeds of hope, trust in the renewing power of the Spirit, and wisdom about personal and communal discernment practices. For each of us as individuals, there are constant choices about what to hold onto, what to let go of, what has to be pruned to bear fruit, what

will evolve beyond our current vision. So too, for Christian congregations, there are times when the shape of the community needs to change, or certain ministries may need to be ended so that new ones can be birthed. Innovation involves a clear reading of context, willingness to look at hard truths, and a communal practice of care, accompaniment, and discernment grounded in Christian faith.

The leaders of this congregation maintained a deep pastoral accompaniment of members throughout the discernment process: “From [one-on-one congregational] conversations and this phase of discernment, pastoral accompaniment became a priority for folks in this time of transition - helping folks connect with and find church homes and pastoral care.” The discernment process was given the time it needed. Members were supported throughout. Change was not abrupt but tenderly held, even when difficult.

In addition, the congregation developed a very thoughtful process of discernment as they considered how to deepen community partnerships in the ending process, as they addressed the question: “How can our resources best meet the needs of our community for this time and context.” They did not self-isolate or withdraw but rather invited others into the process in a hopeful movement, one that would enable the life of the congregation to bear fruit long after the closing of the physical church doors.

Finally, the congregation carefully grounded their situation in a Christian theological perspective of death and resurrection, such that the question of their calling was not instrumentalized but situated in that larger identity of followers of Jesus.