

Executive Summary of *Thriving Congregations in New England—CUME*

Overview: Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary—Boston, known as the Campus for Urban Ministerial Education (CUME), is the grateful recipient of a \$1,000,000 grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. through its Thriving Congregations Initiative. Led by Dr. Virginia Ward, Dean of the Boston Campus and Executive Director for the Northeast Region, *Thriving Congregations in New England—CUME* will provide support to a mixture of multi-ethnic urban, suburban, and rural New England churches that are under-resourced or underdeveloped. In partnership with the Black Ministerial Alliance/TenPoint Boston, the Fellowship of Hispanic Pastors of New England (COPAHNI), and Vision New England, the program will help churches realign their ministries with their mission, adapt to a changing context, and review historic Christian practices. Findings will also be used to create a fresh paradigm for how the Seminary serves the Church in the decade to come.

The Five Characteristics of a Thriving Congregation: Research shows thriving congregations share common characteristics. They:

1. Understand their changing social, cultural, and economic contexts. As a result, they are able to innovate relevant, meaningful, and effective ministries for their ministry context.
2. Exhibit clarity of values and mission that understand that both personal piety and prophetic engagement are inextricably part of the work of the Church.
3. Engage the community in a way that demonstrates the transformational power of the Church.
4. Have healthy leadership and governance structures that foster and support characteristics 1-3, above.
5. Have healthy financial models, so that financial issues do not undermine characteristics 1-4, above.

The Goals and Outcomes for Participating Congregations: *Thriving Congregations in New England—CUME* will enable participating congregations to thrive by engaging them in a two-year learning process guided by trained consultants and in a context of peer learning with congregational triads. The congregational triads will become learning communities, working together to assess and give insight into one another's vitality and health. Throughout the process, congregations will focus specifically on three sets of goals and outcomes.

Each congregation's first goal is to better understand their changing context so that they can increase engagement within their communities. The second goal is to develop clarity about their values and mission, and this will be accomplished by establishing a written vision and mission that is both agreed upon and executable. Third, each congregation will establish a plan for change that, over time, will align their ministries to their newly established values and recently explored contexts. The outcome of this third goal will be an understanding of how congregations grow in their relationship with God and one another, in addition to a clear plan for implementing historic Christian practices to this end.

To document their progress in becoming thriving congregations again, congregations will participate in baseline and endline surveys, in addition to providing monthly reports.

To learn more about *Thriving Congregations in New England—CUME*, Contact
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