

Forward Leadership Community

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Would a program such as this be good at this stage in our church life?

The ***Forward Leadership*** program is designed to equip leaders to initiate and implement change and renewal in their context. For a majority of congregations in the synod they stand poised at a crossroads. After years of slow decline or lack of substantial growth, congregations are taking a look at new directions for worship, programs and mission to address the needs and challenges faced by God's people today. Leaders and members may be aware that the way they have been doing things need to change, but are unsure of what to do or how to do it. As part of the ***Forward Leadership Community*** your congregational ***Forward Leadership Team*** will learn skills and strategies for setting goals, creating action plans, and strengthening leadership skills while sharing best practices and experiences with other teams participating in the program. If your congregation is looking to strengthen its mission and ministry, to experiment, innovate and explore how to "be church" in the 21st century- then this program is for you!

2. We have just called a new pastor, can we still enroll in the program?

Yes! Part of the ***Forward Leadership*** experience is for churches to undergo a rather extensive evaluation before we begin the program year. We use an on-line Congregational Assessment Tool to create a base line for each congregation. During a private consultation with a trained CAT interpreter your congregation's leadership team will see what the congregation as a whole feels are high priorities for their growth, the factors that will contribute to the success of implementing change, areas of ministry that are that weak or problematic and areas that are currently healthy and strong. This information is very valuable as your congregation discerns what kind of programs would flourish and thrive in your current context. The synod is beginning to require that congregations in transition use the CAT as a part of the ministry site profile development. Congregations that have recently called a new pastor will have already completed the CAT and are great candidates for Forward Leadership. During that first

year when the congregation and the rostered relationships and as well as provide opportunities for in depth learning and growth.

The curriculum for the program year is designed to address different aspects of leadership and negotiating change in an organization; a change in pastoral leadership can be a catalyst for all kinds of things, both positive and negative. The Forward curriculum covers areas of that include: conflict resolution, community engagement, identification of adaptive challenges, and recognition of different leadership styles and how diverse gifts can be best utilized in the congregation. The results of the CAT inform how you will apply all of these learnings within your congregation-giving you concrete areas of focus for your ministries and programs.

3. Our congregation is thinking of enrolling in *Forward Leadership*, what sort of commitment does the program entail?

Congregational teams consisting of the pastor and three-four lay leaders will form the ***Forward Leadership Team***. Congregations will sign a covenant promising that the team will attend two overnight retreats, 6 seminar sessions, and one congregation consultation meeting. Each congregation will form an Accountability Team of 4-6 members that the ***Forward Leadership Team*** will meet with periodically to share learnings and ideas about how new strategies can be put into practice. Congregations will agree to engage in this one program for the duration of the year.

4. What if I am unable to attend a seminar?

We strongly encourage members of Leadership Teams to attend all the retreats and seminars, but due to unforeseen circumstances this is not always possible. ***Forward Leadership Team*** members are allowed one excused absence during the program year. Consideration will be given for absences due to illness or emergency. In the case of a planned absence a member of the congregation's Accountability Team is invited to attend the seminar in the ***Forward Leadership Team*** member's place. We ask that Leadership Teams supply copies of resource materials to members who are unable to

attend. Videos and PowerPoint from presentations may also be available upon request. In some instances, seminars will be repeated due to the geographic locations of participating congregations-if this option is available, an absence may be made up by attending the seminar at another host site. We also ask that those members who miss attending the seminar with their Leadership Team sit in on the de-briefing meeting with the Congregational Accountability Team.

5. What is the cost?

The New England Synod is committed to fostering healthy and effective congregations. Congregations are asked to contribute \$150 toward program materials and resources and private CAT consultation. The cost of the Congregation Assessment Tool, CAT, (\$415-\$515) is the responsibility of each individual congregation and will be paid directly to HolyCow! Consulting. Congregations will be responsible for costs of accommodations, meals, and other travel expenses related to the two overnight retreats and transportation costs to the seminars. The New England Synod will underwrite all remaining costs for the cohort group.

6. Is there scholarship assistance available?

At this time we are not offering financial assistance. With the synod underwriting the costs for implementing the program, the fee has already been reduced from \$1800 per congregation.

7. How do we apply?

We welcome motivated congregations and leaders to have honest conversations about their participation. All congregations are welcome to apply; however, space in the program is limited. We encourage congregations to apply early as possible, as applications will be considered on a first come first served basis. The deadline for applications is September 1st for the upcoming new year. For more information or an application please contact: Rev. Sara Anderson (sanderson@nesynod.org) or Kim Bergstrand (kbergstrand@nesynod.org)

8. Can you provide historical data indicating successes and failures from utilizing this program?

We are currently beginning our third year and there are a variety of things that have grown out of the work of Forward Leadership Teams. Congregations have focused on different areas of strength as well as issues identified by the CAT. From launching a community garden, to making the shift to a more mission focused system, to discovering identity and core values, to addressing entrenched conflict, to becoming mission partners with a new Latino congregation...there have been diverse results! We launched Forward Leadership in 2014 as a “pilot” initiative; only five congregations were invited to participate. We learned much from that first year, especially that there was a real desire for this type of collaborative learning community. The 2015 Forward Community had an open application process and eight congregations enrolled. Our 2016 cohort consist of five congregations. Contact Kim or Sara if you would like to contact participating congregational teams about their experience with Forward Leadership.

We view the work of the **Forward Leadership Community** as transformative; building upon the experience and learnings that that happen within the program year congregational teams are given the tools and resources to use not only within the framework of specific goals or changes articulated after reflecting on the assessment but as they move forward and look to the overall mission and vision for the congregation in the future. By working alongside other congregations we hope to establish a lasting network of support and collaboration. It is a one-year commitment but the learning and growth do not stop there. Members of the community are invited to attend alumni events where all of the cohorts can come together to make new connections, learn, and share new ideas and experience.

The **Forward Leadership Community** was inspired by “*Thrive*”, a similar program developed by the Episcopal Diocese of Chicago, which has had great success. They are currently in their third year and have graciously shared their experiences with us as we developed our program here in the New England Synod.