

NEWS

CENTER FOR LEADERSHIP FORMATION



August 27
Location TBA
Greater
Houston area
See Page 2 and
watch for info on
the August event!

A Texas Annual Conference Publication – Spring 2022

NEW FAITH COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD HELPS EXPAND MINISTRY WITH NEW PATHS

Sometimes, the transformation of the world begins with a journey down a new path and into uncharted territory. That pioneering spirit is one that the Texas Annual Conference wants to foster and support. The New Faith Community Advisory Board was designed as a resource for leaders as they expand ministry.

Rev. Morris Matthis, Director of the Center for Leadership Formation, explains that new faith communities can be formed in a traditional way – with the purchase of property, erecting a building and appointing a pastor. Other possibilities include a merger, an adoption or a legacy church that becomes the site of a new congregation.

And there are also alternative faith communities who might meet at a beach, gather under a tree or even schedule a Bible study at a brewery. “Groups like that are aimed at people who might never walk through the door of a church,” Matthis said.

Even though the paths selected may vary, their leaders possess a common trait. They all want to pursue something different.

Matthis explained that 40 percent of people in any given neighborhood, no matter how wonderful their local church or dynamic their preacher, will never step foot inside the congregation. That’s why leaders of new faith communities are so driven to think outside the box.

“It’s all about engaging people with the gospel – and reaching people that we aren’t reaching now,” Matthis said. “The key is thinking about ministry differently – and opening our minds about the future.”

Still, taking a hard look at ministry and determining a new way to forge ahead can be challenging. The Texas Annual Conference created the New Faith Community Advisory Board about six months ago to help. “Each

member, in one way or another, has been involved in creating a new faith community,” Matthis said.

Advisory board members are ready to share their stories and offer guidance. The Conference created a series of short videos introducing each individual.

Matthis is confident viewers will find the episodes inspiring. “I think people will watch and say, ‘Can we do that? Maybe we need to merge or maybe we need to be adopted or maybe there’s a coffee shop in town where we could start a Bible study,’” he explained. “It’s a resource we hope will help people reflect on where God might be calling them.”

Advisory board members will also be available to guide new faith communities through next steps. “These are people who know what it is like, and they are all willing and available to dive in more deeply,”

Matthis said.

Ultimately, he explained, creating new faith communities may be the best way to help others encounter Jesus. “The goal is to reach more people,” Matthis said. “Sometimes, you have to start all over again. You have to own the mission field, have a deep understanding of what they care about and identify with them in meaningful ways. You have to create connections that are authentic and build bridges with the gospel.”

To view the videos and meet the Advisory Board members visit, txcumc.org/NFCs



Rev. Morris Matthis



TAC INNOVATION LAB KICKS OFF IN KILGORE

The Texas Annual Conference's Innovation Lab was designed to inspire and encourage creativity. The event, offered twice a year, provides an opportunity for clergy and lay leaders to meet, brainstorm, motivate and support each other as they search for new paths forward in ministry.

The first Innovation Lab, held March 26 at the Texas Museum of Broadcast and Communications in Kilgore, brought more than 60 participants together for a day of discovering unique ministries and available resources. Small group sessions opened avenues to network and collaborate.

Rev. Keith Tilley, pastor at Grace Crossing UMC in Longview, signed up, because his congregation has been rethinking ministry post-pandemic. "It was very helpful and interesting to hear some of the various ways other local churches are thinking and acting outside of the box to reach their neighbors with the Good News of Jesus," he said.

Individuals also had the chance to pitch their ideas to a panel of innovation coaches. Rev. Tabitha Mock Rankin, director and campus minister for the Tyler United Wesley Foundation, found the experience especially productive. "The feedback was remarkable, and I left Kilgore that day ready to put a plan into motion," Rankin said. "The event was like a breath of fresh air. It felt good to be among other innovative minds."

Dede Looney, children's director at First Lindale UMC, attended the Innovation Lab with her pastor and a lay member. "I love doing new things and starting new ministries to reach more people," she said. "I liked hearing everybody's inventive ideas."

Looney said that innovation is key to being effective. "You can get to a point where you are stagnant," she said. "And sometimes we need to get re-energized. If you're excited about something, others will be too."

“Sometimes you may have an idea in your heart and not really understand where to begin or even how to make it a reality, this workshop encouraged me to try, because I saw so many others who had an idea that worked.”
- Rev. Tabitha Mock Rankin

The second lab will be held on Aug. 27 in the greater Houston area. Rev. Rankin recommends attending. "Sometimes you may have an idea in your heart and not really understand where to begin or even how to make it a reality," she said. "This workshop encouraged me to try, because I saw so many others who had an idea that worked."

Rev. Tilley suggests signing up particularly to ministry teams focused on creative outreach. "To be able to apply for a grant is



also a great catalyst for actually launching something that most churches have no budget for," he said.

The Innovation Lab goes hand-in-hand with the Conference's new Innovation Grant Program, which provides funding to congregations, pastors and districts to expand their mission in creative ways. Grants of up to \$10,000 will be awarded twice annually.

The goal is to help congregations thrive, now and in the future, explained Rev. Morris Matthis, Director of the Center for Leadership Formation. He, along with Bea Garza, leads the Conference's Innovation Team.

"The hope of these innovation funds is to encourage fresh energy, ideas, and risk-taking ministry throughout our Conference," Matthis said. "We want everyone to think about their community, their mission field and how to strengthen their ministries."

The ultimate goal of the Innovation Lab is to assist churches in creating solid proposals and grant requests. Matthis challenges every congregation to consider itself a new church start, having to adapt to a new normal with the pandemic. "If we don't innovate, we will fail in our mission," he said. "Now is the time to build and foster creative ministries."

For more information, visit txcumc.org/tac-innovation-lab



MINISTRY SPECIALISTS – EXPERTS & TOOLS FOR YOUR SUCCESS

When the idea of moving to a single board model of governance arose, Rev. Marilyn White, of Trinity East UMC in Houston, knew where to go for guidance – the Ministry Specialist Initiative (MSI).

She called the Texas Annual Conference’s Rev. Robert Besser, Associate Director of Church Leadership in the Center for Leadership Formation. “I wanted someone to come and share, someone who had been through it and could talk about it,” she said.

Ministry Specialist Rev. John Stephenson, Senior Pastor at Lakeview UMC in Houston, was ideal for the job. He had transferred to a single board as a pastor at a prior post and understood the process firsthand. He also guided two other congregations through the change. “I had the experience needed to help Trinity East UMC,” he said.

MSI, which launched in January, provides congregations with experts and tools needed for success. “It’s really about support and investment in ministry, the local church and our pastors,” Besser said.

Through the Initiative, clergy or congregational leaders assess their needs for

MSI, which launched in January, provides congregations with experts and tools needed for success.

improvement. Congregations are then matched with Ministry Specialists in one of 64 categories.

The cost of the first consultation, or engagement, with the Ministry Specialist is covered by the Conference. The remaining sessions and expenses related will vary depending on the congregation’s needs and the expert involved, Besser explained. It may be fully or partially funded by the conference, the district and or the congregation.

Rev. White, who also retained Ministry Specialist Troy Griffin to help with technology, recommends the program to other clergy in the Conference. “Things come up in ministry, and you wonder who can I call? Now with the MSI, you know where to go for help when you need it.”

Rev. Jeff Dungan relied on the MSI to jump start an architectural project at FUMC Pittsburg.

The congregation was reimagining its facilities. “This helps us start the process of discovering what’s possible,” Dungan said. “It lets us dream.”

Rev. Wesley Duncan at FUMC Alvin served as Ministry Specialist for the project. With experience from his past post in an architectural firm, he is currently drafting ideas and suggestions for FUMC Pittsburg.

Duncan said that the MSI is an example of the connectional system of the UMC. “A lot of churches can work together and accomplish things that they couldn’t before,” he said.

Stephenson agreed. “Having the experience of another person is helpful,” he said. “It really taps into our identity as a connectional church.”

For more information, visit txcumc.org/ministry-specialist-information



CANDIDACY SUMMIT: FINDING THE WAY FORWARD



Ivana Wilson

Finding the way forward into a life in ministry can be challenging. The Candidacy Summit, hosted twice a year, provides an opportunity to meet other travelers on the same route, as well as guides for

the journey. “This is the first step to whatever is next,” explained Ivana Wilson, Candidacy and Recruitment Assistant for the Texas Annual Conference.

The Summit is a multi-day event, designed with all Conference candidates for licensed and ordained ministry in mind. The next forum will be held July 29-30 at First Methodist Church in Conroe. The registration deadline is June 1.

“It’s the opportunity for any candidate who is discerning a call for ministry to find out more about what that could look like.”
 – Ivana Wilson, Candidacy and Recruitment Assistant for the Texas Annual Conference.

“It’s the opportunity for any candidate who is discerning a call for ministry to find out more about what that could look like,” Wilson said. She explained that there are opportunities to explore various paths forward, to join for worship and share call stories. Candidates will receive all the guidance needed to either continue down the path – or perhaps to travel in a different direction.

Candidates meet in small groups with mentors and peers. “The encouragement people receive in those circles is what is needed to move forward in ministry,” Wilson said. “You will have these people on the journey with you the whole time.”

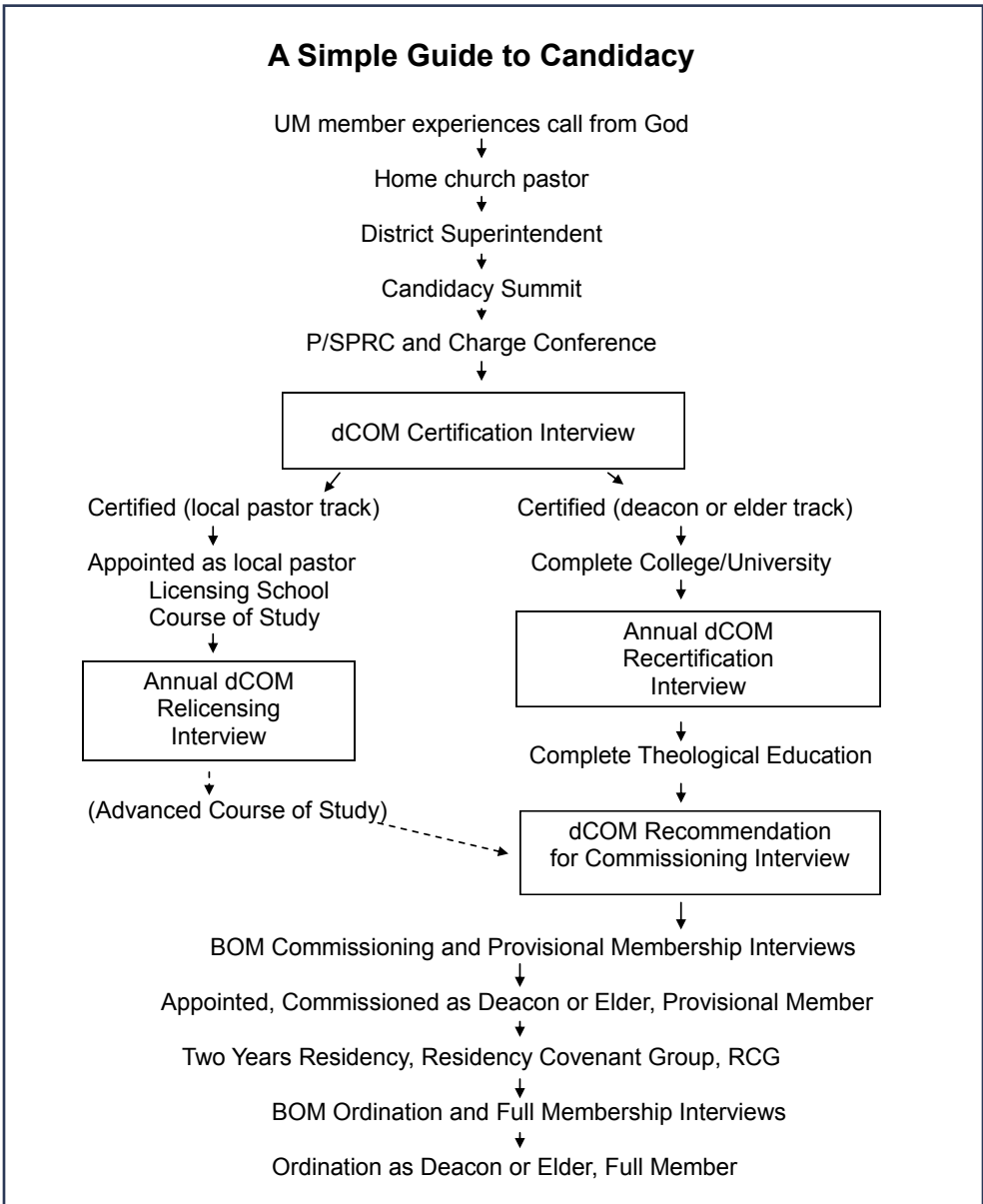
The Summit also includes psychological testing. Wilson explained that focusing on mental health and self-care is an essential part of the program.

Candidates leave the event with an “Exploring Candidate Road Map,” a checklist



The Candidacy Summit is buzzing with the energy of those exploring ministry.

A Simple Guide to Candidacy



to follow moving forward. Participants will continue to meet with their mentors and peers in the future.

The Candidacy Summit is buzzing with the energy of those exploring ministry. Wilson said helping candidates in their process of discernment is a blessing. “It’s one of the

greatest privileges to walk with someone who wants to go into ministry to the point where they are ordained,” she said.

For more information about the Candidacy Summit, visit txcumc.org/candidacysummit

AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCH INITIATIVE OFFERS “NORMALIZING NEXT”

How will the church look after COVID-19? That question has prompted a new offering by the African American Church Initiative (AACI) of the Texas Annual Conference. Entitled “Normalizing Next,” the focus is on how to best prepare for the future, Director of AACI Cohort, Dr. Olu Brown said.

He explained that inspiration for Normalizing Next came from Isaiah 43:19, “Behold, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; Shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.”

Scripture serves as a reminder of the importance of creativity and finding new perspectives. The Holy Spirit thrives in innovation.

Throughout COVID-19, churches have searched for new paths to navigate an uncertain future – and discovered hope along the way, Brown added. Those experiences have provided insight moving forward.

The purpose of the African American Church Initiative is to craft strategies to strengthen African-American congregations in the Texas Annual Conference.

“Church will never be as it was in the pre-COVID-19 world,” Brown said. “Churches that thrive post-COVID must prepare and plan now for the future.”

Normalizing Next was developed to help churches prepare for transformation and success in a changing environment. The offering includes the guidebook “Normalizing Next: A Post-COVID-19 Resource for Church Leaders,” as well as a course dedicated to the subject.

Guest speakers will present a variety of topics, from developing vision, growing leadership and evolving preaching to mastering virtual worship, understanding technology and promoting generosity.

“As the world has shifted, so should our leadership and ministry adjust to a new landscape,” Brown said. He explained that participants will be equipped with coaching tools and resources to energize them and eliminate feeling stuck. The combination of the classes and the guidebook will provide practical ideas to help congregations thrive.

The purpose of the African American Church Initiative is to craft strategies to strengthen African-American congregations in the Texas Annual Conference. “Normalizing Next is one component of our initiative,” AACI Director, Dr. Elijah Stansell said. “This is about building up our local pastors, coming alongside them and offering programs to nurture our ministries.”

Other programs in the AACI include the Laity Empowerment Academy and Transformative Pastoral Leadership course. Each seeks to strengthen African-American churches in the midst of ever-changing times.



SABBATICALS: FINDING TIME FOR REST, REFLECTION, RENEWAL

Helping pastors find time for rest, reflection and renewal is a top priority for the Texas Annual Conference. That is why clergy are encouraged to apply for a sabbatical every seven years of ministry – and why the Conference has fully funded the break from work.

Sabbaticals last up to four months. Bonnie Osteen, Coordinator of Transitional, Intentional Interim Ministry Specialist, explained that the Conference provides and covers the salary of a certified interim pastor to stand in for the pastor and make the absence as seamless as possible. This gives clergy peace of mind, knowing that their

congregations are cared for while they are away. “We have the privilege of providing this gift for our clergy,” Osteen said.

The goal is to ensure nothing stands in the way, she explained. The purpose of a sabbatical is the edification of the pastor, either educationally or experientially. Some might take a pilgrimage or pursue advanced degree work.

Often, pastors want to study a particular

Having a focused time of paid leave can promote longer pastorates and promote self-care.

area of pastoral or specialized ministry. Sabbaticals can also be used for spiritual formation, learning a new type of ministry, exploring a different worship style or even reflection on personal or pastoral experience. “It’s often a time of study,” Osteen said. “Sometimes it’s just about rest



Bonnie Osteen

Continued on pg. 6





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SABBATICALS: *Cont. from pg. 5*

and renewal – and it can also be a combination of reasons.”

Both pastors and their congregants can benefit from a sabbatical, she added. Having a focused time of paid leave can promote longer pastorates and promote self-care. Congregations can show their support for their spiritual leader. “It’s a time for pastors to catch their breath,” she said. “And we are all better ministers when we come back.”

Osteen took a sabbatical when she served as pastor, before assuming her current post. She used the time to study scripture and rest. “It gives you pause – and time to draw closer to God,” she said.

Applications for sabbaticals should outline the purpose, scope, and duration of the leave. Forms are submitted to the District Superintendent and Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) for review. For more information, visit txcumc.org/clergyshorttermsabbatical

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