

Applications Open for 250 Priests to Join Virginia Theological Seminary's Thriving in Ministry Initiative

The program is being expanded after receiving a \$500,000 five-year sustainability grant from the Lilly Endowment, Inc.

ALEXANDRIA, Va., Nov 13, 2023 – Applications are now open for a new cohort of 250 Episcopal priests to join Virginia Theological Seminary's (VTS) innovative Thriving in Ministry (TiM) program.

TiM promotes continuous learning for priests by combining individual coaching with guided peer learning, grouping priests serving in similar types of ministries in peer communities led by a pair of mentor-coaches who are experienced in that same ministry setting and role.

Guided by these trained mentor-coaches, participants share challenging situations, practice regular self-assessment, explore and experiment with alternative pathways, rehearse best practices, and commit to practicing new skills and habits.

The program focuses on eight key areas for leadership, which were identified repeatedly by church leaders across different types of organization, geographies, culture and race, namely connecting people, strengthening shared leadership, engaging conflict, connecting the Gospel to culture, enriching spiritual practices, setting and directing goals, engaging the wider community, and advocating and allying with those on the margins.

Delivered online, it spans two years, with participating clergy receiving nine two-hour group sessions and nine one-hour individual sessions of focused conversation, self-assessment, exploration, learning of best practices, and testing and applying new skills each year.

The Rev. David Gortner, PhD, Program Principal for TiM, explains: "Our process is both deeply personalized and intentionally focused on growth in these eight key areas of clergy leadership. As adult professionals, we learn best when we can focus on the unique challenges and opportunities in our specific types of ministry settings, when we can enter that depth of conversation with others who serve in similar places and roles, and when we can commit ourselves to continuous learning through focused practice with others."

TiM, which operates out of Lifelong Learning at VTS, hosted 66 clergy and lay leaders from across The Episcopal Church at VTS for a week of intensive mentor-coach training in June. The intensive was followed by six months of online practice and refinement of skills. These mentor-coaches will now lead 31 focused peer learning groups of eight clergy per group. Groups are being formed for rectors of larger congregations, associates in mid-sized and larger congregations, priests serving in politically volatile regions, those in churches with affiliated schools or other 501c3 organizations, priests of

African Descent in varied settings, women priests in rising or senior leadership, Episcopal school chaplains, priests leading house churches and church plants, college chaplains and campus ministers, bi-vocational and part-time priests, diocesan staff, regional ministry leaders, rectors and vicars in smaller and mid-sized congregations, priests and pastors serving shared Evangelical Lutheran Church in America /Episcopal settings, and clergy in rural settings.

Earlier this year, TiM secured a \$500,000 five-year sustainability grant from the Lilly Endowment, Inc., which builds on a \$375,000 three-year grant from Trinity Wall Street, enabling it to expand. It has set the goal of working with 10% of all active priests in The Episcopal Church by the end of 2027, and in 2025, it will broaden its scope to include specific peer learning groups for Episcopal deacons and lay ministry staff, and for Evangelical Lutheran Church in America pastors.

Applications for Episcopal clergy who would like to join TiM's next cohort are open until December 15, 2023, and can be found here: <https://thrivinginministry.church/participate/> For more information about the program, please contact the TiM team at thrive@vts.edu.

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Notes to editors:

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About Thriving in Ministry:

TiM was launched in 2018 with the aim of creating vibrant peer learning groups for clergy in distinct settings, and advancing the continuous education of clergy through the support of trained mentors. Between 2018 and 2022, TiM trained 140 priests in peer groups of up to nine people, including 40 priests through a special project with Episcopal AsiAmerica Ministries. Its staff span the United States, bringing significant experience and expertise from a wide range of ministry contexts.

About Lifelong Learning at VTS:

Lifelong Learning at VTS provides continuous theological education opportunities for individuals and lay and ordained leaders. Its multi-faceted program, which is grounded in theology and research-based practices, offers innovative approaches to current ministry challenges, and access to ministry resources, particularly for traditionally underserved populations.

About Virginia Theological Seminary:

Virginia Theological Seminary was founded in 1823 by St. Paul's Church in Alexandria, Virginia. It is the strongest seminary in the Anglican Communion and has a long tradition of shaping faithful women and men, lay and ordained, for leadership in The Episcopal Church and beyond. Visited by three Presidents, the seminary provides more than 25 percent of the clergy of The Episcopal Church.