

CONGREGATIONAL

Vocational Strategic Plan Checklist

Year One

Fall/Spring

- **Begin by exploring your denominational tradition.** What is the tradition in which you were formed? Does this denomination reflect your current theological understanding? Does this denomination support the ministry you are interested in?
- **Visit Churches, Research Denominations, Go to Denominational Days.** Discernment around denomination is very important. If you come to divinity school with a denominational tradition, you should do an assessment to explore how this tradition will support your ministry. If you do not come to divinity school with a denominational tradition, you should explore denominations by talking with students and faculty. For more resources on denominations and how you can learn about them at the School of Divinity follow this link: <https://divinity.wfu.edu/academics/academic-resources/denominational-studies/>
- **Ask yourself what you think about ordination.** Why would you want to seek ordination? What do you believe theologically about ordination? Why would you practically need to be ordained? How does your tradition think about ordination?
- **Ask yourself how your denomination understands ordination.** Every denomination has a specific theological view of ordination. Certain denominations only ordain persons for congregational ministry. Some denominations will not ordain women in Ministry or LGBTQ+ persons. Hence, knowing how your denomination views ordination importantly shapes your ministry.
- **Reach out to your denominational organization to begin the ordination process.** Many mainline protestant denominations have the ordination process align with your three years in divinity school. As such, even if you are unsure if congregational ministry is right for you, go ahead and start your denominational ordination process as soon as possible.
- **Consider what you have to do to be ordained in your denomination.** Some denominations require students to take Greek and Hebrew or a Polity and History class. Some require Clinical Pastoral Education. As such, explore your denominational requirements.

Fall/Spring

- Even more, many denominations require you to be a member of a denominationally affiliated church for at least a year before you can be ordained. Hence, you will want to know the concrete steps you need to take in order to be ordained.
- **Be mindful of the different ways congregational ministry plays out. Full time, part time, traditional, Bi-vocational, Bi-professional.** Many denominations and churches are going towards bi-vocational ministry. As such, you should begin thinking about how you can prepare yourself for some sort of employment outside of the church. What skills can you acquire that make you employable in nonprofit settings? In educational settings? Consider if a dual degree may be appropriate as well. Even if you pursue the traditional ministry route, recognize that upon ordination many search and call processes can take upwards of a year before the minister is actually placed within a congregation. What skills and experiences can you build now so that while you wait for a call you can find steady employment?
- **Learn other Marketable Skills.** Because you may have to be bi-vocational, you should start thinking about what other type of skills you need to develop to allow yourself to have steady employment. Should you get a joint degree? Wake Forest University School of Divinity Partners with the Schools of Education, Law, Business, Sustainability, and Management to offer joint degrees. These are great ways to specifically hone in other skills and enhance your ministry.
- **Ask What type of congregational ministry are you called to?** Head pastor? Associate Pastor? Youth and Family Pastor? All of these are options within congregational ministry. Explore where you feel called. Are you called to rural ministry or urban ministry? Large congregations or small congregations? How will where you are called influence what skills you need? In other words, what are the unique ministry opportunities in the place you are called and how can you prepare yourself to meet them? All of these are important questions to explore, and in many ways will determine how what steps are necessary for you to take in preparation for congregational ministry.

Summer

- **Find an internship placement in a congregation.** The best way for you to find out if congregational ministry is right for you is to be in a congregational ministry setting. You will want to find a setting that gives you opportunities to preach, teach, and provide leadership in other capacities. It cannot be overstated how important it is to have leadership roles in your ministry setting. Your internships are how you gain experience and thus how you will find employment upon graduation. As well, these experiences function as a vocational discernment tool so that you can actually see if the work you think you are interested in fits with your interests, values, and skills.
- **Consider completing a summer unit of CPE.** Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) allows students to gain spiritual and relational care experience, experience in crisis situations, and fosters a better understanding of how our personal stories shape our ministry practices, which are all fundamentally important for congregational ministry. Likewise, some denominations require students to complete a unit of CPE before they are ordained. Each year the School of Divinity hosts a CPE Day where various CPE programs gather to talk to students. Besides the great professional experience CPE provides, CPE is also worth 5 credits. Interested yet? The application process for CPE is lengthy, requires supplemental materials, and can be a competitive process. As such, if CPE is an option for you, then you should have your application completed before the spring semester starts (sometime in January).
- **Continue to develop spiritual practices that keep you healthy.** Figure out who you are and what self-care practices allow you to be your true and full self. Many congregational ministers experience a feeling of burnout in their first couple years of ministry. What practices can you develop now that will help you work through the stress of ministry?

Year Two

Fall/Spring

- **Complete a yearlong internship in a congregational setting.** Working in a congregational ministry setting over the course of the academic year can be a very valuable experience. Many denominations follow the liturgical seasons, which means you should have religious leadership experience in every season. A year long experience also allows you to explore various leadership roles, including worship leadership, relational care, administrative leadership, educational leadership, and community outreach. Ask yourself: what will church in my denomination be looking for in a pastor? Whatever your answer to that question is, seek out those experiences. Even more, because congregational ministers do much more than preach, teach, and provide spiritual care and guidance, you should seek to gain administrative experience in your internships.
- **Consider what classes will best help your ministry.** Classes in Preaching and Homiletics, Worship, Biblical interpretation, Pastoral Care and Relationship Care, Spirituality, theology, and many others are all vitally important for effective congregational ministry work. As well, denominational history and polity classes are important for ordination. However, you will also want to consider taking classes on Fundraising and Grant Writing, Non-Profit Leadership and Management, and other classes that help give you a foundation for the administrative work necessary in congregational ministry.
- **Be honest with yourself: What part of Congregational Ministry makes you most reluctant?** Does providing crisis care scare you? Does preaching and public speaking worry you? Whatever you are most reluctant about, explore why you are reluctant about it, and pursue these experiences. Knowing and being honest with yourself is key for healthy congregational ministry.

Fall/Spring

- **Familiarize yourself with the liturgical practices of your tradition.** What are the rhythms of your tradition, and what do you need to do to be familiar with those? How does your church practice the Christian seasons? How does your tradition practice baptism and communion?
- **Where are you in your ordination process?** If you still have steps to do before ordination, get those done as soon as possible so that you can enter into the search and call process.
- **Continue asking yourself important life questions:** What are your salary and benefit expectations? Where do you want to live and work? What are your family goals and your family's expectations? What will you need to do to maintain a healthy work-life balance? All of these questions are very important to ask and talk with your family about. If you are married or plan on getting married, if you have kids or plan on having kids, in what ways will congregational ministry be challenging to those roles? How can you prepare yourself now to maintain a healthy family?

Summer

- **Find an internship placement in a congregation.** The best way for you to find out if congregational ministry is right for you is to be in a congregational ministry setting. You will want to find a setting that gives you opportunities to preach, teach, and provide leadership in other capacities. It cannot be overstated how important it is to have leadership roles in your ministry setting.
- **Consider completing a summer unit of CPE.** Some denominations require students to complete a unit of CPE. Even if this is not the case, CPE provides students will wonderful experiences in crisis situations, develops relational skills, and fosters a better understanding of the self, which are all fundamentally important for congregational ministry.
- **Consider an internship in a faith-based nonprofit setting.** Many of the skills and experiences you can acquire in a faith-based nonprofit are applicable to congregational ministry. Churches are looking for new and unique ministry opportunities to add a "fresh" element to what they are doing, expanding their ministry outside the walls of the church. What type of work motivates you? What type of experience could you gain that meshes well with congregational ministry? Even more, gaining experience in a nonprofit will round out your experiences so that you have more opportunities if you need to pursue bi-vocational ministry.
- **Continue to develop spiritual practices that keep you healthy.** Figure out who you are and what self-care practices allow you to be your true and full self. Many congregational ministers experience a feeling of burnout in their first couple years of ministry. What practices can you develop now that will help you work through the stress of ministry?
- **Network.** Except for a few denominations that place you in specific congregations, networking with other ministers in your denomination will be extremely important in securing a congregational ministry job. This might simply begin as information interviews, which are short 10 – 15-minute conversations with current pastors about their experience, always ending with asking them if they could give you the name of someone else to talk to. Or, networking might look like going to Regional and General assemblies. Limited funding for attending denominational conferences is available (Check with Office of

Year Three

Fall/Spring

- **Take Pastoral Care or Other Relational Care Courses.** Since chaplaincy is largely driven by providing relational care to persons, taking these classes early on in your divinity school career can help you discern if this is the type of work that energizes you. Please note that some students find taking the course Pastoral Care *after* having some experience in providing spiritual and relational care is more beneficial. Talk with Dr. Jensen to see when it would be best to take Pastoral Care.
- **Research requirements for Board Certification.** Many chaplains have to be board certified. You can explore the requirements for certification at apc.org.
- **Research CPE Residency Programs.** In order to become a board-certified chaplain, you will need 4-5 unites of CPE. Hence, after you have completed your first unit you can apply for a full-time residency program for post-graduation. There are thousands of CPE Residency programs across the United States and a quick google search can initiate the search process. You can also look for CPE Residency programs on the ACPE website:
https://www.acpe.edu/ACPE/News/ResidencyOpenings_PostingDate.aspx
- **Consider these important questions when looking at Residency programs.** What populations do you prefer to work with? Children? Elderly? What setting? Trauma centers? Extended care facilities? What geographic location do you want to work in? What specialized programs (i.e. mental health, neonatal)? Become clear on your discipline and pastoral goals and what programs fit those goals. How can these programs help you achieve your board-certified competencies? Does your residency program support your preparation for board certification?

Fall/Spring

- **Begin applying for CPE residency programs.** Once you have found residency programs that you are interested in, begin putting together the application materials. You need to work with your professors and mentors to make sure all supplemental materials are completed in a satisfactory manner.
- **Find a denomination.** Becoming a chaplain requires a denominational endorsement. As such, if you do not already belong to a denomination, begin searching for a denominational base. If you do belong to a denomination, start conversations with your denomination to figure out what steps are necessary to garner a denomination endorsement. You are encouraged during residency to complete your ordination endorsement if possible so that you can step into the chaplaincy field ASAP.

Post Graduation

Important Skills to Foster

- **Speaking:** Talking to others to convey information effectively.
- **Active Listening:** Giving full attention to what other people are saying, taking time to understand the points being made, asking questions as appropriate, and not interrupting at inappropriate times.
- **Writing:** Communicating effectively in writing as appropriate for the needs of the audience.
- **Teaching:** Creating and implementing curriculum.
- **Complex Problem Solving:** Identifying complex problems and reviewing related information to develop and evaluate options and implement solutions.
- **Systems Evaluation:** Identifying measures or indicators of system performance and the actions needed to improve or correct performance, relative to the goals of the system.
- **Management of Personnel Resources:** Motivating, developing, and directing people as they work, identifying the best people for the job.
- **Management of Material Resources:** Obtaining and seeing to the appropriate use of equipment, facilities, and materials needed to do certain work.
- **Negotiation:** Bringing others together and trying to reconcile differences.

Congregational Ministry Job Outlook

- According to “Insights into Religion,” a website that promotes research on religious institutions, “Current data suggests that while the number of small churches is expanding, the majority of church attendees are moving into megachurches. As a consequence, fewer clergy will be able to follow a traditional career path from smaller to larger churches. The overall pulpit vacancy rate remains high because many clergy cannot afford the salaries offered by small church and part-time opportunities.” <http://religioninsights.org/resources/21st-century-clergy-job-outlook>

Denominational Resources at WFUSD

- Many faculty members at Wake Forest University School of Divinity are connected to a denomination, some more so than others. Here is a list of faculty members who are a part of a denomination:
- **American and Cooperative Baptist:** Dr. Bill Leonard
 - **Alliance of Baptist:** Dr. Mark Jensen and Dr. Christopher Copeland
 - **Evangelical Lutheran Church of America:** Dr. Katherine Shaner
 - **Episcopal Church:** Dr. Porter Taylor
 - **National Baptists:** Dr. Derek Hicks
 - **Presbyterian (PCUSA):** Dr. Jill Crainshaw, Dr. Melva Sampson, and Dr. John Senior
 - **United Methodist Church:** Dr. Shonda Jones
- For a full listing of denominational resources, please go to this link: <https://divinity.wfu.edu/leadership-development/career-services/job-listings/denominational-job-links/>