

# REIMAGINING CURACIES: AN UPDATE

In Fall 2018, the Diocese of North Carolina shared the news it had received a nearly \$1 million Lilly Endowment grant to help establish Reimagining Curacies, a program designed to form newly ordained clergy into community-conscious leaders dedicated to the values of Becoming Beloved Community through authentic community and racial reconciliation. It was part of Lilly Endowment Inc.'s Thriving in Ministry, an initiative to support a variety of religious organizations across the nation as they create or strengthen programs to help pastors build relationships with experienced clergy who can serve as mentors and guide them through key leadership challenges in congregational ministry.

Over the ensuing 12 months, a great deal of work has occurred to put in place the first stage of the project: the participating congregations. These congregations, St. Titus', Durham; Chapel of the Cross, Chapel Hill; and St. John's, Wake Forest, are now in place and ready to proceed with the next phase.

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Diocese is one of 78 organizations located in 29 states taking part in the nearly \$70 million Thriving in Ministry initiative. The organizations reflect diverse Christian traditions: mainline and evangelical Protestant, Roman Catholic and Orthodox. Thriving in Ministry is part of Lilly Endowment's grant-making to strengthen pastoral leadership in Christian congregations in the United States, a grant-making priority at Lilly Endowment for nearly 25 years.

Reimagining Curacies focuses on developing clergy into transformative leaders during their initial placements in congregations after they graduate from seminary. While

traditional curacies place new priests in one congregation for two or three years, this new model will assign cohorts of three priests to three vibrant congregations near each other for three years, with each priest serving one year in each congregation. These placements are geographically proximate to one another but differ in size, liturgical preference, racial and ethnic composition, community context and specialized ministries. North Carolina's rich mixture of urban, suburban and rural communities in close proximity to each other provides a unique opportunity for priests to experience the range of challenges and gifts the state's communities have to offer.

These new priests will also benefit from spiritual direction, mentoring, coaching and leadership development experiences with their peers and colleagues. It is the Diocese's hope that supervising and mentoring clergy will continue to develop their own sense of vocational identity for the future church and experience the gift of real relationship with peers and partners in ministry. At the same time, the congregations involved in this initiative will develop a broader sense of their own gifts, as well as their own missional identity.

## THE CHURCHES

A great deal of discernment took place even before conversations took place with interested churches. Though the long-term goal is to offer the opportunity to any congregation that wishes to host a cohort, it was decided to proceed in this pilot round with churches in the geographical area proximate to Raleigh and Diocesan House. Several churches responded to an invitation to take part in a discernment day, a full-day workshop hosted by the project's executive committee, where they learned about the project, what was

Chapel of the Cross, Chapel Hill; St. Titus', Durham; and St. John's, Wake Forest, are the three pilot churches for Reimagining Curacies.



expected in terms of supporting and developing the curates in the cohort, and had the chance to ask candid questions before returning to their church homes to continue discerning this call with congregational leaders and vestries.

At the 204<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention in November 2019, the Rt. Rev. Sam Rodman announced the churches comprising the first-round of Reimagining Curacies are St. Titus', Durham; Chapel of the Cross, Chapel Hill; and St. John's, Wake Forest.

"After more than two years of dreaming and planning this project, it is exciting to see real progress happening," said the Rev. Nathan Kirkpatrick, member of the executive committee. "The three congregations chosen as our first-round churches will be great places for new priests to learn who they are as priests and how they are called to inhabit this ministry."

St. Titus' is a historically black congregation whose roots reach back to 1887, when St. Philip's, Durham, reached out to the residents of the then-Hayti district. Some early records have been lost to history, but it was in 1909 that then-Archdeacon Henry Beard Delaney formalized and renamed the mission team St. Titus'. The church has weathered ups and downs in the last century, but they have persevered, never losing sight of their commitment to the community, to God or to each other. Today, St. Titus' is a thriving parish that continues to reach out to its neighbors, developing relationships that expand the ways St. Titus' contributes and celebrates unity in Christ.

Chapel of the Cross is located in the heart of Chapel Hill with roots that date back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The church's location provides a unique cross-section of congregants, as they are deeply involved with the University of North Carolina, though as their website proclaims, Duke fans are every bit as welcome. Though one will find congregants of every age in the pews when they visit,

## LEARN MORE

Learn more about the participating churches:

- St. Titus', Durham:  
[sttitusdurham.dionc.org](http://sttitusdurham.dionc.org)
- Chapel of the Cross, Chapel Hill:  
[thechapelofthecross.org](http://thechapelofthecross.org)
- St. John's, Wake Forest:  
[stjohnswf.org](http://stjohnswf.org)

Follow the progress of the project at [reimaginingcuracies.org](http://reimaginingcuracies.org).

Chapel of the Cross has a strong commitment to youth and young adult ministry, offering regular opportunities for conversation around faith and issues of the day, and, like their fellow project churches, sharing a love of community outreach.

St. John's, Wake Forest, is an active and growing parish. Like many congregations, St. John's spent many of their early years as worshiping nomads, gathering in private homes, a funeral parlor and a college classroom. They finally found a permanent home in 1962 and consecrated their current home in 1984. The diverse congregation enjoys a vibrant parish life, including the Sophia Sisters, comprised of all St. John's church women and dedicated to "woman wisdom." This wisdom is by no means confined to the women, as all of St. John's is involved in the community outreach programs supported by the church.

## NEXT STEPS

Now that the churches are in place, the next phase of the project is the selection of the participating curates. The call is expected to go out in the early part of 2020, with the hope the curates will be in place by summer.

As the first round gets underway, the plan is to continue generating cohorts to allow the opportunity for other congregations to participate. "We are looking forward to expanding the program this autumn to involve clergy and congregations beyond the initial three sites," said Kirkpatrick, "so that this will truly be a diocesan-wide commitment to the future church."

The hope for this project and what is learned from it is to offer a model to other dioceses and to The Episcopal Church as a whole. As seminaries—and the church—change, additional models for clergy formation are needed that take seriously the challenges and opportunities of ministry in this age. By reimagining curacy for the future church, we hope to enable new clergy, longer-tenured clergy and congregations to thrive in ministry together.

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