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BRINGING, GROWING, AND CHANGING CONGREGATIONS AND COMMUNITIES TOGETHER



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Executive Minister
Co-Director



Rev. Dr. Linwood Blizzard, II
Co-Director



Rev. Dr. Mary Young
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Rev. Dr. Cheryle Rodriguez
Coordinator of Christian Faith Formation
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GREETINGS FROM THE BGCVA PRESIDENT



Dear Baptist General Convention of Virginia Family,

We are delighted that The Baptist General Convention of Virginia has received a

grant to establish the “Bringing, Growing, And Changing Congregations and Communities Together” project. The project is being funded through Lilly Endowment’s Thriving Congregations Initiative. Hats off to former president, Milton Palmer Bunting, Executive Minister Leo Whitaker, Dr. Linwood Blizzard II, Dr. Mary Young, and Dr. Cheryle Rodriguez for a job well done in blessing the Convention with this amazing opportunity.

As the senior pastor of the Providence Transformation Church International (Baptist) in Lynchburg, I am grateful that our church has received from the Lilly Endowment funds a church learning grant. Like communities throughout the pandemic impacted Commonwealth of Virginia, COVID-19 exacerbated the achievement gap and learning loss in Lynchburg amongst area students. The grant funds from Lilly have assisted us with a small-scale tutoring and mentoring program with elementary students and others as needed. I tell you there are poignant stories of young students whose lives have positively changed and performance in school improved because of their involvement.

I passionately believe that “Shoulder to Shoulder” we can come together in the spirit of Psalm 133 and watch God fulfill Ephesians 3:20 now unto him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that worketh in us.

Therefore, I hope you will enjoy this edition of the Baptist Herald that highlights the stewardship of BGCVA as it relates to the Lilly Endowment

Inc. I trust you will be able to see that the Baptist General Convention of Virginia is hard at work doing the work of the Lord as Baptists throughout our great Commonwealth.

Lastly, I cannot wait to see all of you at the 126th Annual Session in Roanoke, Virginia. The dates are June 22-26, 2025. Lord Have Mercy, we are going to have an enjoyable time! Register today and spread the word! With warm regards, I remain,

Shoulder To Shoulder,

Dr. James E. Coleman, Jr., D.Min.
President

GREETINGS FROM THE BGCVA EXECUTIVE MINISTER



We Praise GOD for Our Lilly Grant!

On behalf of President James E. Coleman, Jr. and the General Board of BGCVA, we are honored to

share in this Herald an update from the 2024 Cohorts and an invitation for your church to join the 2025 Cohorts. “Bringing, Growing & Changing Congregations and Communities Together” focuses on helping churches develop ministries and expand practices that are relevant to the lives of the congregants, help congregants connect more closely to GOD and each other, and empower congregants to serve the relevant needs of their communities. Please talk with your pastor and people about applying for the 2025 Cohorts as we work together Shoulder to Shoulder!

I am grateful for the stellar leadership of Dr. Mary H. Young, Dr. Cheryle W. Rodriguez, and Dr. Linwood T. Blizzard, II with their collective work and witness in this great ministry.

Dr. Leo Whitaker, Executive Minister

BGCVA'S LILLY GRANT COHORT INVITATION 2025

Greetings BGCVA Family,

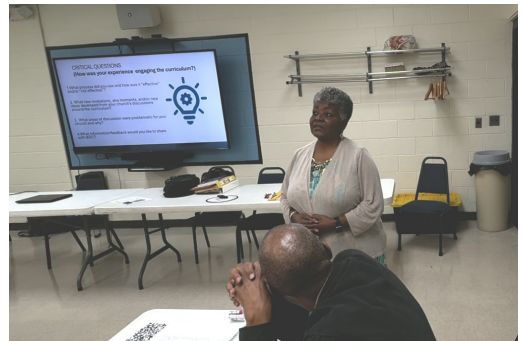
We hope you are well. The Lilly Endowment Team is pleased to invite churches to apply to participate in the second cohort of the ["Bringing, Growing and Changing Congregations and Communities Together"](#) initiative. The five-year grant-based program is designed to help congregations deepen their relationships with God, enhance their connections with each other and contribute to the vitality of their communities.

The churches that are selected receive leadership training, a three-module curriculum outline, one-on-one consultation, and participate in interactive, engaging group sessions. Additionally, churches will benefit from wraparound services that help to equip them to build capacity for ministry effectiveness.

The Lilly Grant initiative, which is focused on helping churches thrive, is free for all participating churches. The online application is available by visiting the [Baptist General Convention of Virginia](#). A virtual information session for all churches interested in learning more, will be held **Monday, March 10, at 6 p.m.**

The deadline to submit the application is **Friday, April 11, 2025.**

We hope we are blessed with the opportunity to "Build, Grow and Change Congregations and Communities" with you; and as Rev. Dr. James Coleman, BGCVA President says, working together “Shoulder to Shoulder.”



[BGCVA'S LILLY GRANT VIDEO LINK](#)



Baptist General Convention of Virginia, Inc.
Lilly Endowment, Inc. Grant Initiative
“Bringing, Growing, and Changing Congregations and Communities Together!”



Program Information

Grant Purpose

The Baptist General Convention of Virginia’s (BGCVA) five-year grant of \$1,250,000 to begin a series of projects and initiatives is designed to help congregations grow spiritually, relationally, and socially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, we aim to develop state-managed, regionally based Wraparound support to churches as they explore how Christian practices grounded in their traditions and appropriate to their contexts may provide both the framework and patterns of activity needed to revitalize and strengthen their ministries and help their congregational life to flourish and create change in their communities.

Grant Curriculum

The Convention will focus this work around helping churches develop ministries and expand practices that are relevant to the lives of the congregants, help congregants connect more closely to God and each other, and empower congregants to serve the relevant needs of their communities. This grant project will give attention to individual churches, to clusters of churches, and to the Convention’s 29 regional associations across the state.

Church Commitment

This grant period began in January 2024, with activities designed to be completed across five calendar years. Churches involved as *Cohort Churches* or *Recipients of Learning Grants* will participate in data gathering processes, attend training and capacity-building sessions organized around the grant objectives, and share their learnings with the larger BGC family.

Church Involvement

A. *Cohort Churches* (By Application)

Churches (50/year) will be selected with consideration to geographical location, size of membership, and church type (rural, suburban, or urban). The cohort churches will represent the Convention’s five geographical areas: Central Virginia, Northern Virginia, Southern Virginia, Eastern Virginia, and Western Virginia.

B. *Church Learning Grants* (By Application)

These grants (10/year) will allow churches to focus their energies on a particular community outreach program. Grants of \$1,500 per church will provide helpful support in both identifying and executing community programs.

Cycle of Participation

- Every year for 5 years, a new group of 50 churches will be selected from across the BGC areas to participate as *Cohort Churches*. Churches from the previous year will continue to share their experiences with the Convention.
- Every year for 5 years, a new group of 10 churches will be able to apply for *Church Learning Grants* of \$1,500 each.

Opportunities for Participation

While some member churches of the BGCVA will engage the grant through focused participation as a cohort congregation or recipient of a learning grant, all churches connected to the Convention will benefit from the training, resources and ministry building opportunities offered at the regional association and state levels. These opportunities will be responsive, specific, and collaborative in their aim of helping churches develop post-pandemic relevant ministries, connect more closely with God, and become empowered to serve their communities.

Benefits of the Grant

The work of the BGCVA has continually been attentive to helping churches and leaders build capacity for Christian Faith Formation ministries. The current structure of the Convention allows that work to be envisioned and experienced through the lenses of well-established life-cycle ministry offerings, groups of clergy, laymen, and women. Other social and cultural initiatives such as health awareness, social action, and finance and tax compliance help to make up the curriculum of training offered to member churches. This grant will, with the assistance of a team of experts and consultants, expand and enhance those efforts by allowing BGCVA to focus its energies and work directly with congregations in measuring the impact of that work at the local and communal levels.



Baptist General Convention of Virginia, Inc.
Lilly Endowment, Inc. Grant Initiative
“Bringing, Growing, and Changing Congregations and Communities Together!”

Cohort Church Application Information

The application to become a cohort church can found and submitted online by visiting www.bgcva.org/lilly-grant.html. For those unable to apply online, please send your typed responses to the following questions to the BGCVA at 1214 West Graham Road, Suite 1, Richmond, Virginia 23220. **The application deadline is April 11, 2025.**

Congregational Demographic Information

- What is the name of your church?
- What is your church's zip code?
- Application location of church: Rural, Suburban, Urban
- What is your church's phone number?
- What is your church's fax number? If none, please write "none."
- What is your church's email address? If none, please write "none."
- What is your church's website? If none, please write "none."
- How many members does your church have on its records?
- What is your church's weekly attendance in-person?
- What is your church's weekly attendance virtually (online services)?

Pastor's Demographic Information

- What is your pastor's name?
- What is your pastor's gender?
- What is your pastor's highest level of academic achievement?
- What is your pastor's age?
- Does your pastor have military experience?
- Is your pastor employed outside of the church?
- How many years has your pastor served as the pastor of your congregation?
- How many years has your pastor served as a pastor in their pastoral career?
- In absence of pastor, name and contact information of Chair of Deacons or Diaconate Ministry

Church Participation and Engagement

- Association affiliation
- How engaged is your congregation with the local association?
- BGCVA gathering attended in 2022 – 2024
- BGCVA priorities that your church has contributed any amount to in 2022 – 2024
- Please list other state denominational affiliations within the Baptist Church for your church other than BGC.
- National denominational affiliations within the Baptist Church
- International denominational affiliations within the Baptist

Bringing, Growing, and Changing Congregations and Communities Together

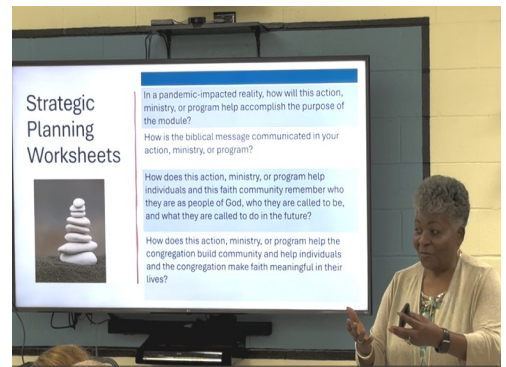
- How does the vision of the congregation connect with the purposes of this grant?
- What about the grant's purposes ignites your church's interest?
- What has been your congregation's greatest success?
- What has been your congregation's greatest challenge?
- What is your congregation's most urgent need?
- If selected, is your congregation willing to be engaged with the process?
- If selected, is your congregation willing to send representatives, including individuals who may serve as teachers, to a regional one-day conference and a state-wide conference for the cohort work?
- Has your congregation ever participated in a Lilly Endowment, Inc. grant before? If so, please provide the project title and timeframe.

Application Contact Information

- Primary Contact – Name, Position, Phone Number, and Email Address
- Secondary Contact – Name, Position, Phone Number, and Email Address
- Applicant Contact – Name, Position, Phone Number, and Email Address

For more information, please email info@bgcva.org or call (804) 228-2421





A GRANT WORTH TALKING ABOUT

The Baptist General Convention of Virginia is pleased to share that the first year of the Lilly Grant Endowment initiative has successfully concluded. The Lilly Grant Team is now accepting applications for the second cohort, which will begin its session in April 2025. With the impactful work produced by the first cohort, the team looks forward to the blessing of partnering the Cohort 2025. To that end, the 2025 application for “Bringing, Growing and Changing Congregations Communities Together” is now available for churches interested in engaging tools to grow spiritually, relationally and socially.

A Grant Worth Talking About: Celebrating How Churches Blessed Themselves and Others as a Cohort Church.

After a rush to meet the Lilly Endowment deadline, and a quick roll-out of the initiative, if you ask the cohort churches and the Lilly Grant Team, they are likely to say it was worth it. With faith and desire to share the blessing of a five-year \$1.2 million dollar grant with churches around the Commonwealth, the team developed a powerful three-module curriculum, designed to help congregations more intently connect with God, connect with each other and connect with their communities.

One of the members, from one of the 36 churches that applied to be a cohort church, discussed how the first module, “Connecting with God,” gave rise to strong emotions that highlighted the need for a ministry that focused on mental health. During the teaching session, some church members expressed intense feelings, resulting from trauma created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Facilitator Cynthia Lassiter with St. John Baptist Church in York County shared that when engaging the curriculum, lesson with members “hands were raised, and tears fell” resulting from the teaching. “Most people have some type of trauma from loss, and it may not be from death of a loved one.”

The Lilly Grant specifically speaks to supporting BGCVA churches to discern what COVID-impacted changes exist how those realities have changed congregational membership, lack of in-person attendance, an exodus of youth and young adults from the church and other factors remain real challenges. For all of these reasons and more, the BGCVA believes that a broad stroke participation of churches statewide would serve the training aims of the organization. Beyond these stated congregational changes, the leadership of the organization believes that through the work of the grant, opportunities exist for an assessment of congregational health at the state level.

Participating congregations are encouraged to re-examine and re-define their missions, begin to think of faith nurture and growth in more non-traditional ways, and envision how they might develop and enlarge their impact in the community and the world.

The 36 Cohort Churches represented all five regions of the Commonwealth.

- Central Region - 11
- Northern Region - 4
- Western Region - 2
- Eastern Region - 15
- Southern Region - 4

The Lilly Grant Team hosted both virtual and in-person sessions. The team traveled to all five regions of the Commonwealth. Team members introduced the curriculum and assisted churches by providing “**train the trainer**” sessions, spiritual formation sessions and resources needed for a successful implementation of the curriculum into the life of the church. Some churches used the curriculum for Bible study, others opted to use the curriculum as an additional learning opportunity. In some instances, pastors reinforced the curriculum by preaching a sermon series focused on the curriculum lessons. In addition to the cohort model, each church was invited to seek resources and support as part of concept to provide wraparound services. Wraparound services help equip churches to build capacity for ministry effectiveness.

The Lilly Grant also provided opportunity for churches to focus on community outreach specific to the needs of each individual community. Churches around the Commonwealth, including those part of the cohort, were invited to apply for a \$1,500 Church Learning Grant. To keep the grant evaluation unbiased, the Lilly Grant Team invited independent evaluators to review the 23 applications submitted, using a scoring system. The churches’ enthusiasm and appreciation for the opportunity, resulted in an impressive pool of applications. The Lilly Grant Team planned to award 10 Church Learning Grants. However, the competitive outcome of the application scores, the Lilly Grant Team was honored to award 13 Church Learning Grants.

The grant recipients are using the funding for various community service initiatives that include tutoring students, mental health support, promotion for entrepreneurial training, health screening event, and food programs. Learning Grant churches were asked in what ways their church’s mission statement suggests the importance of ministry to the community. An applicant responded: “Our mission drives us to uplift those in need and support the oppressed, serving as a catalyst for change and a beacon of hope. Through vibrant worship, fellowship, teaching, evangelism, and mission work, we extend our influence beyond the church, reaching the broader community and beyond.”

Churches have consistently welcomed the work with enthusiasm and engagement. The grant curriculum invites churches to pause and reflect on who they are and what they do. This reflective process brings with it a certain level of newness and freshness that may have been lost in the cycle of their normal work and ministry. Participants at churches are welcoming the learning process of the curriculum as an opportunity for both personal spiritual growth, and generous and transparent conversations that strengthen congregational ministry and mission.



Rev. Dr. Leo Whitaker
Co-Director



BRINGING, GROWING, AND CHANGING CONGREGATIONS AND COMMUNITIES TOGETHER



A VIRTUAL INFORMATION SESSION ON BGCVA'S LILLY ENDOWMENT INC. GRANT



Rev. Dr. Linwood Blizzard, II
Co-Director



Rev. Dr. Mary Young
Consultant

MONDAY MARCH 10th 6 PM

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81059879507?pwd=5P3Z3SlolXKb91LOaRQsahwjGHA0Jl.1>

Meeting ID: 810 5987 9507 Passcode: 1899

Join By Phone

+1 305 224 1968 or +1 309 205 3325
Meeting ID: 810 5987 9507 Passcode: 1899



Rev. Dr. Cheryle Rodriguez
Coordinator of Christian Faith Formation
Administrative Assistant

** For more information contact the BGCVA Office 804.228.2421 or info@bgcva.org **

www.bgcva.org

List of Cohort Churches

- Antioch Baptist Church, Varina
- Faith Community Baptist Church, Richmond
- Gillfield Baptist Church, Petersburg
- Good Shepherd Baptist Church, Richmond
- Guildfield Baptist Church, Midlothian
- Jerusalem Baptist Church, Doswell
- Mount Olive Baptist Church, Richmond
- Mount Tabor Baptist Church, Richmond
- New Life Faith Center, Henrico
- Rising Mount Zion Baptist Church, Sandston
- Trinity Baptist Church, Richmond
- Bethel Baptist Church, Franktown
- Ebenezer Baptist Church, Exmore
- First Baptist Church, Claremont
- First Baptist Church, Hampton
- First Gravel Hill Baptist Church, Smithfield
- Jerusalem Baptist Church, Temperanceville

- Macedonia Baptist Church, Heathsville
- Mount Olive Baptist Church, Wicomico Church
- Mount Zion Baptist Church, Farnham
- New Mount Calvary Baptist Church, Exmore
- Olive Branch Baptist Church, Portsmouth
- Saint John Baptist Church, Williamsburg
- Third Baptist Church, Hampton
- Union Baptist Church, Spring Grove
- Chantilly Baptist Church, Chantilly
- First Baptist Church, Vienna
- Jerusalem Baptist Church, Sparta
- Second Baptist Church, Falls Church
- Diamond Hill Baptist Church, Lynchburg
- Greater Brandon Chapel Missionary Baptist Church, Alton
- Pleasant Grove Missionary Baptist Church, South Boston
- Providence Transformation Church International (Baptist), Lynchburg
- High Street Baptist Church, Roanoke
- Lee Street Baptist Church, Bristol

List of Church Learning Grant Awardees

- New Mount Calvary Baptist Church, Exmore
- Pleasant Grove Missionary Baptist Church, South Boston
- Thirty-first Street Baptist Church, Richmond
- Faith Community Baptist Church, Richmond
- Saint John Baptist Church, Williamsburg
- First Baptist Church, Hampton
- Union Street Missionary Baptist Church, Danville
- Greater Brandon Chapel Missionary Baptist Church, Alton
- New Life Faith Center, Henrico
- First Gravel Hill Baptist Church, Smithfield
- Mount Olive Baptist Church, Centreville
- Providence Transformation Church International (Baptist), Lynchburg
- Mount Olive Baptist Church, Wicomico Church



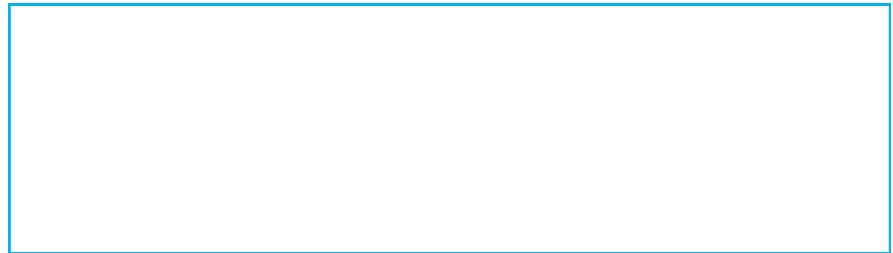
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