

INNOVATE. INTEGRATE. ELEVATE.

THRIVING IN MINISTRY 2024 ANNUAL PROGRAM REPORT

Grant # 2018 0568

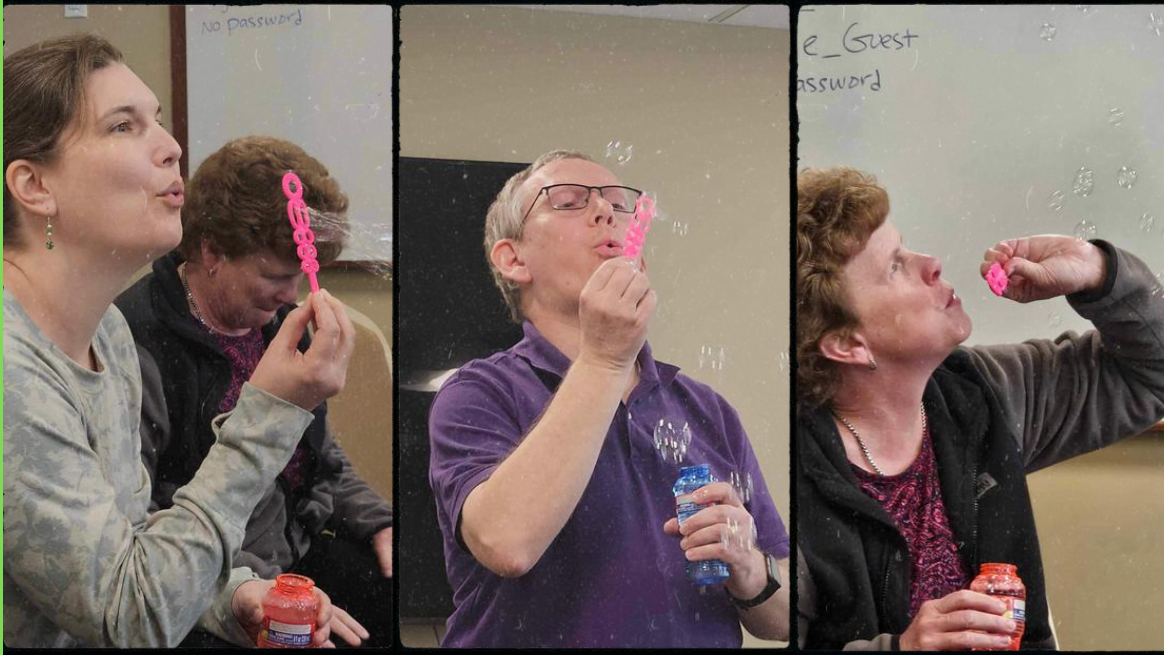
United Methodist Foundation of New England

January 1, 2024 thru December 31, 2024



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Innovate 3 Cohort members and Facilitator

ANNUAL PROGRAM REPORT INNOVATE. INTEGRATE. ELEVATE. UNITED METHODIST FOUNDATION OF NEW ENGLAND MARCH 31, 2025

The United Methodist Foundation of New England serves churches, agencies, clergy, and individuals within the New England Conference of the United Methodist Church and the Conference itself. The Foundation's mission is to innovate and invest in the transforming work of laity, clergy, and faith communities through socially responsible investment management, providing grants for innovative ministries, developing pastoral leadership, teaching stewardship education, training church leaders, financial consulting, and much more.

Innovate, Integrate, Elevate program goals for participants:

- Deepening their relationship with Christ and continuing to define their personal call to ministry.
- Creating a healthy community of colleagues through meaningful relationships.
- Enhancing their ability to be agents of change in their local faith communities, across New England, and into the world.

PROGRAM PURPOSE

IIE's purpose is to provide a gathering space where pastors can be in community to explore adaptive challenges to ministry in the 21st century and thereby strengthen their pastoral leadership to empower and enable themselves and their faith communities "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."

The IIE program addresses challenges faced by clergy in specific areas of ministry. Using Christ as the example, IIE meets pastors in their current context and giftedness by continually assessing their changing challenges and the tools and skills they need to address those challenges. Each cohort is designed to meet the needs and challenges of the specific group, with conversation partners and intentional gatherings and programming. While this is true of every group, it is particularly true for our Cross Racial/Cross Cultural (CR/CC) and affinity based cohorts which are designed to address leadership development with a lense that highlights matters of identity and belonging.

This program fits into the mission of the Foundation because one of our core values is the commitment to "equip clergy to be more effective in serving Christ and the church through personal and life planning workshops, consultations, pastoral resources, and leadership development." The Foundation began this process with the goal of developing over 100 pastors/ministry leaders by 2024 who are visionary, transformational, well-equipped leaders engaged in vital 21st century ministry and prepared to teach others. At the end of 2024 we are just short of meeting that goal with 87 pastors who have participated in IIE. Given the disruption of Covid-19, we are satisfied with the number as it is so far and look forward to exceeding that goal in 2025.

GRANT ACTIVITIES

Most of IIE's activities take the form of cohorts. Below is a brief description of all the cohorts for the length of the grant as well as the relevant activities for the ones that were active in 2024.

More than anything, these sessions brought us back to ministry as a faith journey, a growth journey, with our Lord and with each other. Techniques and skills are vitally important and build from that foundation." - Innovate 3 participant

Innovate

Innovate is designed to bring together pastors in a variety of settings as well as representing different areas, understandings, and approaches to ministry.

- **Innovate 2** was the first cohort in the grant and completed their experience in April 2022.
- **Innovate 3** began in October 2022 and completed their journey in May 2024.
 - Gathering 5 was held at the Barbara C. Harris Camp and Conference Center in Greenfield, NH in January. The Conversation Partner was Olu Brown who guided the pastors through conversations and reflections on *The Faith Factor: Waiting, Praying, Thinking, and Acting in Hope*.
 - Gathering 6 was held at our traditional last gathering place, the Wylie Center & Tupper Manor at Endicott College. The Conversation Partner was Eric Tucker, an Off Broadway Theatre Director from New York City. Eric challenges the participants to harness their inner actor and use performance techniques like improvisation to tell old stories in new ways.

"I developed a 4-part sermon based on Olu Brown's book on Faith with good feedback and fruitful conversations with parishioners as a result." - Shannon Keeney, Innovate 3 Clergy

- **Innovate 4** began in October 2023.
 - Gathering 2 was held at St. Methodios Faith and Heritage Center in Contoocook NH in January. The Conversation Partner was Michael Baughman, a favorite among all of the cohorts who have welcomed him. Mike engages the participants in grieving well and reconnecting with their call to ministry.
 - Gathering 3 was held at Mountain Fare Inn in Campton, NH in May. The Conversation Partner was Ann Garrido who brought the concept of conflict resolution and difficult conversations to the participants in an accessible and impactful way. This has consistently been a Conversation Partner that numerous participants have stated that they've used her teaching in a variety of challenging and stressful situations.
 - Gathering 4 brought the cohort back to St. Methodios Faith and Heritage Center in September. Here, Kathi McShane, author of *Picking Up the Pieces: Leadership after Empire*, challenged cohort members to look at leadership, theirs and others', in a new way given the context of the world we live in now and how ministry has changed.
 - The cohort will conclude in May, 2025.

"Innovate is not your typical leadership training. It's a community that gathers in beautiful settings to share ideas with conversation partners and one another to tackle very real challenges of ministry in this time and place." - Innovate 4 Clergy Kim Manion

- **Innovate for Women** focuses on the unique experiences of ministry and leadership as women and through the lens of intersectionality. This cohort also began in October 2023.
 - Gathering 2 was held at St. Methodios Faith and Heritage Center in January 2024. The Conversation Partner was Jessica Taylor from Fresh Expressions. As a Conversation Partner she brought so many of her intersecting identities (young, woman, mother, and lay person) that added value to the Fresh Expressions conversations.
 - Gathering 3 was held in May at an AirBNB in Falmouth, MA (right across from the beach!) The Conversation Partner was Ann Garrido who was thrilled to converse with a group of all women about having difficult conversations.
 - Gathering 4, held in October, convened at the Barbara C. Harris Camp and Conference Center. The Conversation Partners were two women from a local nonprofit that strives to ignite and nurture the ambition of our most disconnected young people to trade violence and poverty for social and economic success. They brought their expertise in community organizing and development to the conversation while also relating to the context of the cohort as the only two women (and women of color!) in their perspective departments.
 - The Innovate for Women Cohort will hold Gatherings 5 and 6 in 2025, finishing out their cohort experience.

"I can build friendships with my friends, and I can relate to them because they are pastors in the same Conference. This time, I got inspiration for new ministry and encouragement from other participants. Because they are people with different cultures and backgrounds, it is a time for a broader experience." - Innovate for Women participant

- **Innovate 5** began in 2024. The introduction session was held in September on Zoom and had 11 attendees. We had 8 pastors commit to the cohort.
 - Gathering 1 was held in October at Saint Methodios Faith and Heritage Center, and the Conversation Partner was Michael Baughman reflecting on grieving well and reconnecting with their call to ministry. The story-telling Mike uses with the groups made for a strong kickoff for the cohort that fostered familiarity, vulnerability, and connection.

- Innovate 5 will continue on with their cohort experience with 3 gatherings in 2025 before they finish with 2 gatherings in 2026.

"It's a very diverse group, different life experiences, country of origin, we're all different, which is great! I was the person who received guidance about a ministry issue in our first gathering. The thing that was most helpful was learning that we all have these problems that we're trying to figure out and that we need help from our ministry colleagues sometimes. The advice was helpful and hearing that what I am doing is good ministry was affirming."
 - Nicholas Perez, Innovate 5 Clergy

Integrate

Integrate is designed for pastors who are serving in CC/CR appointments.

- **Integrate 1**, consisting of Korean-American pastors, completed their experience in March 2023.
- **Integrate 2** is also a cohort of Korean-American pastors that originally began in September 2023. Because of major life changes such as moving appointments and familial career changes, the numbers of Integrate 2 fell below the necessary number of cohort members. We relaunched the cohort in 2024 with new members and an adjusted the schedule. This relaunch brought the group from 5 members to 8 members and also diversified it by adding two women pastors to the cohort. We are learning that though this relaunch was intended to work within cultural norms per conversations we had with a number of Korean pastors and leaders, we have found that the blending of the two groups has been challenging.
 - Gathering 3 (the first of the new, blended group) kicked off the Integrate 2 relaunch in November. Held at Mountain Fare Inn in Campton, NH, Rev. Dr. Sungho Lee was the Conversation Partner. As a Korean Pastor who has served in a number of CR/CC appointments, Sungho brought conversation and reflection on effective small group ministry.
 - This cohort will continue with 3 more gatherings in 2025.

"I really appreciated how the schedule was thoughtfully organized to create a perfect balance between learning and relaxation throughout the three-day workshop. It made the experience both enriching and refreshing." Integrate 2 Clergy member

Elevate

Elevate focuses on multi-vocational pastors (MVPs) and full-time pastors looking for more support in their ministries.

- The Jumpstart cohort for pastors looking to name, explore, and respond to challenges in their ministry context began in 2021 and concluded in April 2023.
- Boost 1 for MVPs was a cohort experience that met from September 2020 to May 2022. They gathered twice a year, four weeks each time, meeting for 2 hours/week.
- Boost for MVPs got a makeover in 2024, switching from a 2-year cohort experience to a yearly one-time retreat based experience. The first iteration of this version of Boost was held in March at St. Methodios Faith and Heritage Center in Contoocook, NH with 20 pastors attending! The weekend included building relationships, validating the importance of Licensed Local Pastors, learning, and reflections.

ACTIVATE

ACTIVATE is a new facet of IIE. It is open to IIE alumni and their congregations to Discern, Define, Design, and Deploy a ministry project that meets community needs. This cohort requires the pastor and at least 2 congregants to participate. The process takes place over 8 months with a combination of virtual and in person gatherings happening monthly. ACTIVATE is guided by a team of facilitator's, IIE Director David Abbott, Assistant Director Christyn Bergquist, and coach, author, and thought leader Olu Brown. Church teams are encouraged to apply for a grant from the Foundation following the completion of the program.

- In August we had 5 pastors show interest with support from their congregations. We visited each church and met with the interested teams. Four churches committed to participating in ACTIVATE.

- The September and October gatherings were designated for the “Discern” portion of the program with the aim of having churches define the actual needs of their community. Through a virtual 2-hour gathering and a 5-hour in-person gathering we shared conversations around two texts, *Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less* by Greg McKeown and *Normalizing Next* by Olu Brown. We also gave tools and considerations for assessing needs within their communities and creating relationships with other community organizations.
- The November and December gatherings, both held virtually, tackled the “Define” phase in which participants were to name the need in the community that they could help meet and how they could do that.
- In 2025 there will be 4 more gatherings that focus on the “Design” and “Deploy” phases.

Day Conferences

Workshop: We hosted a half-day workshop prior to the kick-off of Annual Conference in June that was open to IIE participants, 17 pastors attended. For some, this was an opportunity to experience IIE, and at least one attendee committed to a cohort after this experience. More about the program, Creative Worship, can be found in the stories below.

Annual Dinner: We held our Annual IIE Dinner during Annual Conference in June. It was held at Danversport Restaurant in Danvers, MA with 60 participants and friends of IIE attending the evening of appreciation, community, and relaxation.

PARTICIPATING CLERGY

Innovate 3 was comprised of 4 women and 4 men, with one pastor who served in a cross racial/cross cultural (CR/CC) appointment. This cohort is on the younger side and serve a variety of churches and communities. There was also an ecumenical blend in the group with pastors from different denominations.

Innovate 4, with 7 men and 2 women, is another cohort that skewed a little younger than our conference average. They served a variety of churches and contexts and one served in a CR/CC appointment.

Innovate for Women involves of 8 women, 4 of whom were in previous IIE cohorts, and 4 who serve in CR/CC appointments. Their churches and ministry contexts are varied and they bring a variety of intersecting identities, an important aspect of this specific cohort.

Integrate 2 originally had 6 Korean men. When 2 participants left the cohort due to personal and relocation issues, we had to decide how to move forward. We reopened the cohort and recruited 4 additional Korean members, 2 women and 2 men.

Innovate 5 consists of 2 white women, 2 white men, a black man, and a Brazilian man. They have a range of experience, age, and appointments.

ACTIVATE's 4 clergy members have all participated in other IIE cohorts (it is a requirement!). The cohort has 1 Korean man who was in Innovate 3, 1 Korean woman who was in Innovate 2 and is in Innovate for Women, and 2 white women, one of whom was in Innovate 1 and one who was in Innovate 2.

I.I.E. RESOURCES

The IIE program utilizes a multi-layered set of resources to support clergy in their growth, formation, and leadership development. The core resources include trained facilitators, nationally recognized conversation partners, and individualized coaching support, all of which have proven to be highly effective in equipping clergy for thriving in ministry.

Each cohort is assigned a facilitator who accompanies the group throughout the duration of the program. Facilitators provide continuity, guide cohort gatherings, uphold the covenantal structure of the group, and ensure that learning and reflection are grounded in both theological depth and practical application. Conversation Partners are carefully selected leaders, theologians, and practitioners with expertise in adaptive ministry challenges. They bring rich theological insight and lived pastoral wisdom to each gathering, offering clergy both new frameworks and actionable tools for ministry. Their role is consistently cited by participants as one of the most impactful elements of the program, helping pastors translate learning into context-specific action. Professional coaching is another key support. Each participant selects a coach from our list of ICF-certified coaches and may meet up to nine times per year to process cohort experiences, navigate ministry challenges, and reflect on personal and vocational development. For clergy participating in the ACTIVATE initiative, coaching is provided by Olu Brown, offering targeted support as they lead ministry innovation with their congregational teams.

In addition to these personnel-based resources, IIE integrates relevant written and community-based tools. Resources such as *Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less* by Greg McKeown and *Normalizing Next* by Olu Brown provide shared language and conceptual grounding across cohorts. For ACTIVATE specifically, we are also curating a growing catalog of community resource tools, including MissionInsite and United Way databases, to assist congregational teams in understanding local needs and assets.

Finally, the experience and expertise of the IIE leadership team itself—particularly David Abbott’s knowledge of grant-supported ministry innovation and Christyn Bergquist’s background in community nonprofit work—have become invaluable internal resources that enrich the program’s content and strategic development. Among all resources, the most consistently effective have been the combination of facilitated peer learning, expert-led conversation, and individualized coaching, which together create a holistic support system that empowers clergy to grow spiritually, lead adaptively, and engage their communities more fully.

LEADERSHIP

The IIE program is led by David Abbott, Director, and Christyn Bergquist, Assistant Director. Together, they serve as the anchors of the program—designing content, cultivating partnerships, facilitating programming, and providing support to participants. Their work reflects a commitment to responsive leadership rooted in both theological vision and practical ministry experience.

Over the past year, both David and Christyn have continued to grow in their own leadership through adaptive program design, deepened community engagement, and ongoing theological reflection. A notable area of growth has been their intentional shift toward program sustainability, ensuring that IIE remains responsive to clergy needs while expanding its impact. Their leadership has evolved to include not only cohort development but also new initiatives like ACTIVATE, which moves leadership development from reflection to community-rooted action.

Through the implementation of ACTIVATE, David and Christyn have embraced a more collaborative and facilitative leadership model—one that empowers both clergy and laity to take active roles in shaping ministry initiatives. This shift has also nurtured shared leadership between pastors and congregants.

An encouraging development has been the emergence of leadership among laity participating in ACTIVATE. Congregational team members, have stepped into active leadership roles, demonstrating creativity, initiative, and a deep sense of ownership in ministry projects. This emergence affirms a broader vision of shared ministry and strengthens the theological grounding of the program's impact.

Additionally, former cohort participants are also emerging as leaders—some leading the way for New England Annual Conference's Fresh Expression's initiative, serving as facilitators, or collaborators on new program components. This internal pipeline of leadership demonstrates the program's long-term effectiveness in cultivating transformational leaders who continue to contribute to the wider ministry landscape beyond their initial cohort experience.

The leadership team's continued adaptability, reflective learning, and strategic visioning are driving program impact and shaping a more sustainable and participatory future for the IIE initiative.

2024 PARTNERS

Within our organization we are blessed to work with a team that supports our work. We are especially grateful for a talented financial team who help us with all of our budget-related tasks.

In 2024, IIE also engaged with the following organizations on behalf of our program:

- New England Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church
- St. Methodios Faith and Heritage Center - Contoocook, NH
- Mountain Fare Inn - Campton, NH
- Wylie Inn and Conference Center - Beverly, MA
- Grafton Inn - Falmouth, MA
- Barbara C. Harris Camp and Conference Center
- The Wild Goose Resource Group of the Iona Community
- ICF Coaches

We are continuing to grow partnerships. Through our conversations about sustainability we have identified a few key areas where we will continue to expand the work we do with other organizations.



**Wylie Center
& Tupper Manor**
at Endicott College



New England Conference
The United Methodist Church

I.I.E. STORIES

Innovate, Integrate, Elevate...

ACTIVATE

In 2023, as the organization emerged from the most challenging phases of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Foundation initiated a reflective process to assess the impact of the Innovate, Integrate, Elevate (IIE) program. With strengthened assessment tools in place, we gathered substantial evidence indicating that clergy participants felt deeply supported in their vocational call, experienced a renewed connection to Christ, valued the presence of a beloved community, and felt better equipped to serve as transformational leaders within their congregations. Participants also reported growth in key areas such as ministry innovation, leadership development, and conflict resolution. However, as we looked more closely at the broader outcomes, we recognized a gap: while personal and congregational transformation was evident, we had fewer concrete examples of measurable impact at the community level or sustained, visible change within congregational systems.

At the same time, clergy completing their IIE cohorts began asking an important question: “What comes next?”. Graduates expressed a desire for continued challenge, deeper engagement, and opportunities to translate their learning into action with real impact.

These dual insights led to the creation of ACTIVATE—a new phase of the IIE initiative designed to move from reflection to implementation. While IIE focuses on theological dialogue, vocational discernment, and leadership development, ACTIVATE provides a structured and guided pathway to put those learnings into practice through community-based ministry initiatives.

In designing ACTIVATE the leadership team explored what would make a significant and sustainable impact in our communities. The result is a program that equips clergy and lay teams to discern local needs, define ministry responses, design contextualized initiatives, and deploy action plans that embody the marks of thriving ministry.

Innovate. Integrate. Elevate.

ACTIVATE

Discern. Define. Design. Deploy.

Goals

- Each congregation will intentionally design, implement, and assess their project with successes, learnings, failures, and next steps moving forward.
- The faith community will be able to individually replicate this process in the coming years as they seek to be the living and loving presence of Christ in the world.
- For the Foundation: ACTIVATE will be a program that can be lead and shared in replication across the New England Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church and beyond.

Discern

Determine the needs of your community and identify what you can provide to address those needs. The discernment process involves a thorough consideration of three key aspects:

- The Church's Past: Reflect on historical activities, successes, and challenges.
- Current Passion and Resources: Assess the present enthusiasm, skills, and assets available within the church.
- Future Vision: Envision how the church aims to reach and impact the immediate community in the future.

Define

Clarify how your program can meet the identified community needs. This step involves:

- Getting Clear on the Project Scope:
- Determine the specific objectives, activities, and boundaries of the program.

Design

Identify who else needs to be involved and how you can enlist partners. This step involves applying the following aspects to the project:

- Why: Clarify the purpose and goals of the project.
- What: Define the specific activities, resources, and outcomes expected.
- Who: Identify key stakeholders, partners, and team members essential to the project.
- Where: Determine the locations and environments where the project will take place.

Deploy

Develop an action plan to execute your vision and complete the grant application. This step involves:

- Action Plan: Create a detailed roadmap outlining the steps, timelines, and responsibilities for executing the project.
- Grant Application: Ensure that all necessary information is gathered and organized to complete the grant application accurately and compellingly.

Teams and Resources

- Each team will consist of 3-5 members including the pastor.
- Each team member will receive a copy of three books:
 - Faith: 4 Essential Practices
 - Normalizing Next® Book
 - Normalizing Next® Guidebook
- Free E Course "Developing Your Faith"
 - <https://learn.olubrown.com>
 - Each pastor will receive monthly coaching from Olu Brown

Program Dates

September 11, 2024 6-8:00pm - Discern Virtual Session
October 5, 2024 9am - 2pm - Discern In-Person Session
November 7, 2024 6-8:00pm - Define Virtual Session
December 12, 2024 6-8:00pm - Define Virtual Session
January 9, 2025 6-8:00pm - Design Virtual Session
February 7-8, 2025 - Design In-Person Session
March 6, 2025 6-8:00pm - Deploy Virtual Session
April 3, 2025 6-8:00pm - Deploy Virtual Session



Facilitator: Olu Brown

Oluji (Olu) Brown is the father of Daya Elom Brown and Langston Wesley Brown. Olu is a native of Lufkin, Texas. He graduated from Jarvis Christian College in Hawkins, Texas and earned a Master of Divinity degree from Gammon Theological Seminary of the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Georgia.

He served as the Lead Pastor of Impact Church, a young congregation in the East Point community of Metropolitan Atlanta (impactdcd.org). With Olu's vision and leadership, since its founding in 2007, Impact grew from a core team of 25 people to more than 5,000 worshipers in-person and online with a \$4M budget and listed at number 5 in the 25 Fastest Growing Large United Methodist Churches, 2018 Edition.

On May 16, 2021, Olu announced his retirement from the local church effective June 2022. For his retirement, Olu is using the phrase, Normalizing Next®, which is the concept about how to best prepare for the future, especially churches that experience any kind of change or transition. Normalizing Next® is when you are no longer afraid to do your best to prepare for and strategize so that one can be fully successful.

Olu currently coaches, consults and facilitates full-time through his company, Culverhouse LLC, and helps leaders and organizations Normalize Next®. Olu is a certified PCC level coach (Professional Certified Coach) through the International Coaching Federation (ICF). To find out more information about Olu Brown and his resources, visit olubrown.com

To launch ACTIVATE, the leadership team conducted in-person visits to prospective participating churches, meeting with each pastor and 2–4 lay members. These gatherings provided space to introduce the program, learn more about each congregation’s unique ministry context, and begin building relationships.



David and Christyn visit with the Greenland UMC ACTIVATE team

Following a period of discernment, all four churches visited committed to participating in the program:

- Greenland UMC (Greenland, NH)
- Grace UMC (Lynn, MA)
- Arnold Mills UMC (Cumberland, RI)
- Wesley UMC (Concord, NH)

A total of 23 individuals are currently participating in ACTIVATE across these congregations. One of the most meaningful pieces of feedback we’ve received is that the program offers space for lay leadership to emerge and flourish. Pastors noted that ACTIVATE gives their teams the opportunity to “own it,” shifting leadership from being solely clergy-driven to a more collaborative, church-led approach. This reflects a core theological conviction that thriving ministry must be rooted in shared leadership and congregational ownership.

Teams have already begun engaging in critical activities such as mapping community assets, researching partnerships with local organizations, and discerning their congregational strengths, interests, and capacity for ministry. Emerging ministry themes include mental health support, immigrant and refugee assistance, outreach to unhoused families, and fostering cultural belonging. The early stages of this work have been deeply inspiring, and we are eager to see how these projects take shape in the months ahead.

ACTIVATE represents a pivotal next step in the IIE framework—bridging vocational formation with tangible community impact, and deepening our commitment to empowering congregations to thrive in ministry through discernment, action, and Spirit-led innovation.



Quote

“Our pastor, Myung Park, gathered a few people she thought might be interested in this opportunity. Several in the congregation had attended Fresh Expression through the Conference. Some of us were on board on those concepts, but it is a little hard to focus. ACTIVATE was very focused and would allow us to take a deep targeted approach to our mission outreach. An opportunity to apply for a grant was attractive too.

Lynn, MA has such great needs. We have a nice facility with parking, on bus routes and on a main entry to the city. The church is not located in areas of our urban center, but there are much needs close by as well. We did a little survey for interests in our church. We listed organizations, what these organizations were doing now, potential needs that might not already being addressed and it turns out we were able to match organizations already addressing these. A list of these resources was developed to facilitate this.

It’s nice to dream and not get stuck in the reality of main stream churches not attracting our traditional constituency. Olu Brown grew his church with a few members to a huge church. The Wesley’s started a movement. I like the potential hope.”

Joan Comeau, Grace Church, Lynn, MA

To the right: Grace UMC ACTIVATE team at work during our in-person gathering in October.

BOOST! Retreat and Renew!

Licensed Local Pastors (LLPs) serving in quarter-time or half-time appointments represent a vital segment of clergy that the Foundation is deeply committed to supporting. However, we recognize that many LLPs are bi-vocational, often working full-time in other professions, which makes participation in traditional cohort models difficult due to time constraints and scheduling challenges.

In response to these realities, we developed a targeted retreat-based model designed specifically for LLPs. In 2024, we piloted a one-time weekend retreat, intentionally structured to meet the unique needs of this clergy group. To reduce barriers to participation, we also provided support for pulpit coverage on the Sunday of the retreat—a critical accommodation that enabled more pastors to attend without disrupting their congregational responsibilities.

The retreat was designed as a two-day experience of radical hospitality, offering space for rest, reflection, connection, and ministry enrichment. Our goal was to honor the distinct calling of LLPs while providing meaningful support and tools they could bring back to their ministry settings.

The retreat welcomed 20 LLP participants and was facilitated by John Mueller, a member of Innovate 1 and previous facilitator for the Boost cohort. Mike Baughman served as the Conversation Partner, bringing insight and theological grounding to discussions throughout the weekend.

The retreat offered clergy space to:

- Build beloved community,
- Reflect on the rich and storied tradition of Licensed Local Pastors,
- Share the unique challenges and realities of their ministry context, and
- Receive practical tools and spiritual encouragement to sustain their call.

The feedback from participants affirmed the success and impact of this model. Conversations throughout the retreat highlighted a deep sense of validation, community, and vocational renewal. Importantly, both participants and facilitators affirmed that the retreat format is better suited to the needs of most LLPs than a traditional cohort structure.

As a result, we have determined that this retreat-based approach will continue in 2025, offering a scalable and sustainable way to provide support to LLPs across the Conference. This shift reflects our ongoing commitment to adaptive leadership development—meeting clergy where they are, honoring the diversity of their lives and calls, and creating accessible pathways to thriving in ministry.



Quote

"This weekend I got to spend time with some wonderful clergy on a retreat. Thank you so much to the wonderful David Abbott, Christyn Bergquist and John and Mike for planning and executing a great retreat with some really great discussions and reflections. I got to reconnect with some old friends, make some new friends and have a lovely time of renewal and rest in the midst of a busy Lenten season."

Retreat and Renew Participant



Creative Worship: A Pre-Annual Conference Workshop for IIE

In early 2024, the IIE team was approached by a participant from the Innovate 1 cohort, who proposed an exciting collaboration with another project she was leading. Her vision was to bring Jo Love, a Resource Worker from Scotland with the Wild Goose Resource Group, to facilitate a half-day workshop on Creative Worship for IIE participants. The workshop was scheduled to take place on the first day of Annual Conference, prior to the official start of the event.

This collaboration provided a unique opportunity to present IIE participants with new, creative, and participatory forms of worship—offering both inspiration and practical strategies that clergy could bring back to their congregations.

Workshop Descriptor: Creative Worship: Exploring possibilities for creative and participative forms of worship, bringing symbolic action, visual arts, and more embodiment into how we offer ourselves to God together and respond to God's call on our lives.

Bio: Jo Love has been a Resource Worker with the Wild Goose Resource Group since 2009. Previously she worked in urban parish team ministry, with a growing emphasis on developing worship which set her up for her current post! Drawing others into creative thinkings and doings is her passion and delight. She is also a keen journaller and beachcomber and loves walking in the rain.

Participant feedback reflected deep appreciation for the workshop, highlighting both the worshipful atmosphere it created and the tangible ideas it sparked for reimagining worship within their own ministry settings. The workshop served not only as a meaningful entry point into the Annual Conference experience but also as a catalyst for ongoing liturgical creativity in the field.

Quotes

"In the Creative Worship workshop, Jo Love offered both an amazing time of worship which set the tone for me to participate more fully in the Annual Conference, as well as a time of creative planning and dreaming for how to bring such experiences into my local church."

Workshop Participant

"I enjoyed the combination of experiencing creative worship and sharing of strategies and ideas for creating worship. I loved Jo's enthusiasm and her encouragement to us, and her patient and inviting way of leading discussion and sharing times."

Workshop Participant



LESSONS

Our evolving theological understanding of thriving in ministry is deeply rooted in the lived experiences of clergy who are continually rediscovering their call, encountering Christ in community, and embodying adaptive leadership in response to the Spirit's movement in our time.

The Innovate, Integrate, Elevate (IIE) program centers on the belief that thriving in ministry is marked by:

1. A deepened relationship with Christ,
2. Authentic, supportive BELOVED community,
3. Leadership development that empowers clergy to be agents of change with the capacity for faithful adaptability in a rapidly shifting ministry landscape.

Adaptability has emerged as a central theological commitment. A tangible expression of this theological shift is reflected in the Boost program for Licensed Local Pastors (LLPs). Recognizing the unique vocational realities of LLPs—often bi-vocational or serving multiple churches in part-time appointments—we transitioned Boost from a cohort model to a weekend retreat format. This decision honored their time constraints while still offering space for rest, renewal, community connection, and an opportunity to learn. The overwhelmingly positive response affirmed our belief that thriving must be contextual and adaptable.

The program intentionally integrates theological and biblical resources to support its vision of thriving in ministry. Conversation Partners bring theological insight and practical application, guiding participants through spiritually grounded leadership development.

Biblical reflections, such as those drawn from *The Faith Factor: Waiting, Praying, Thinking, and Acting in Hope* by Olu Brown, frame discussions around hope and faithful action. Additional resources such as *Normalizing Next* by Olu Brown and *Essentialism* by Greg McKeown offer theological grounding in discernment, simplicity, and mission engagement. Creative worship experiences have also expanded theological imagination and provided tangible models for local church renewal.

Key insights include:

- Clergy relationships are critical for vocational resilience. Cohorts foster trust, community, and shared wisdom.
- Programs like ACTIVATE support clergy in translating learning into action within their communities, contextualizing theoretical practices.
- Lay leadership development is integral to sustainable ministry. ACTIVATE has highlighted the power of shared leadership between clergy and congregants.
- Adaptability is a theological imperative. Shifting program formats to meet clergy needs has demonstrated that flexibility, when guided by discernment and mission, enhances impact.

Together, these insights continue to shape our understanding of what it means to thrive in ministry and how we as an organization can best support it.

"I talk with them (Innovate for Women Cohort) about everything from community outreach to how to run the church office as the only staff person. I also rely on them for advice on how to lead a mostly white congregation as a woman of color. You have to work harder. They came into my life at the right time." - Milka Gonzalez from Innovate for Women

SUSTAINABILITY

At the time of writing this report we are also writing our application for the Sustainability Grant. We are excited about the opportunity to continue this work and increase the positive impact we are having in New England. We have secured a partnership with the New England Conference of the UMC and are in conversations with Ministry Incubators to explore more funding options.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE AND NEXT STEPS

Over the course of the grant, we have navigated several shifts and adaptations due to factors such as COVID-19, a grant extension, budget revisions to accommodate ACTIVATE, and our commitment to meeting the evolving needs of clergy in New England while honoring their feedback.

The charts to the right illustrate the proposed vs actual implementation. Notable changes include discontinuing the use of the cohort name Jumpstart after it developed an unintended negative connotation.

Additionally, Innovate for Women and ACTIVATE were introduced in response to clergy feedback and insights from current IIE members, reflecting our ongoing commitment to adaptability and responsiveness.

The original Implementation Timeline:

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Cohort	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
Innovate #2	X	X	X			
Elevate - Licenced Local Pastor #1		X	X	X		
Integrate - Cross Cultural #1		X	X	X		
Innovate #3			X	X	X	
Elevate - Licenced Local Pastor #2			X	X	X	
Elevate - Jump Start #1			X	X	X	
Integrate - Cross Cultural #2				X	X	X
Elevate - Licenced Local Pastor #3				X	X	X
Elevate - Jump Start #2				X	X	X

The current Implementation Timeline:

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Cohort	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8
Innovate #2	X	X	X					
Elevate - Licenced Local Pastor #1		X	X	X				
Integrate - Cross Cultural #1			X	X	X			
Innovate #3				X	X	X		
Elevate - Licenced Local Pastor #2						X		
Elevate - Jump Start #1			X	X	X			
Integrate - Cross Cultural #2					X	X	X	
Elevate - Licenced Local Pastor #3							X	
Innovate #4					X	X	X	
Innovate for Women					X	X	X	
Innovate #5						X	X	X
ACTIVATE #1						X	X	
ACTIVATE #2							X	X

Next Steps:

Looking ahead, several key initiatives will continue and expand as we build on the progress made during the grant period:

- Integrate 2, Innovate 4, Innovate for Women, Innovate 5, and ACTIVATE will extend their cohort experiences into 2025.
- Boost will continue with a weekend retreat in the Fall of 2025.
- A new ACTIVATE cohort will be launched in Fall 2025.
- Innovate for Portuguese-Speaking Pastors will begin in Spring 2025, expanding our reach to better serve this community.
- A sustainability grant application will be submitted in 2025 as we continue to explore new partnerships and funding opportunities to ensure the long-term viability of these programs.

These next steps reflect our commitment to sustaining and expanding impactful initiatives while securing the necessary resources for their continued success.

BASELINE DATA

1. Name of Organization: United Methodist Foundation of New England		
2. Clergy Cohorts	2024	Total to Date**
Number of cohorts begun by your program	2	10
Number of pastoral participants in cohorts	10	73
Number of congregations represented in cohorts	10	60
3. Other Learning/Training Events		
Number of events conducted by your program	16	60
Number of pastoral participants in all events	128	439
Number of congregations represented in all events	61	72

4. There are no other statistics or trends we have noticed or are tracking currently.

5. Gatherings or significant events for 2025:

Date	Event and Description	Location
1/7-9/25	Innovate 4 Gathering 5 with Dawn Hand "The Pastor as Point Guard." Leadership tools learned from sports.	Mountain Fare Inn, Campton, NH
1/21-23/25	Innovate for Women Gathering 5 with Dr. Beryl New - Engagement in Under Resourced Communities	Mountain Fare Inn, Campton, NH
1/28-30/25	Integrate 2 Gathering 4 with Kil Jae Park - Preaching from a CC/CR Perspective.	St. Methodios Faith and Heritage Center, Contoocook, NH
2/18-20/25	Innovate 5 Gathering 2 with Daniel Park - Fresh Expressions.	Mountain Fare Inn, Campton, NH
5/6-8/25	Innovate 4 Gathering 6 with Eric Tucker Telling Old Stories in New Ways.	Wiley Conference Center, Beverly, MA
5/13-15/25	Innovate 5 Gathering 3 and Integrate 2 Gathering 5 with Ann Garrido - Difficult Conversations.	St. Methodios Faith and Heritage Center, Contoocook, NH
5/19-21/25	Innovate for Women Gathering 6 with Eric Tucker - Telling Old Stories in New Ways.	Wiley Conference Center, Beverly, MA
6/19/2025	Annual IIE Dinner at Annual Conference	Danversport in Danvers, MA
10/7-9/25	Integrate 2 Gathering 6 with Sungho Lee - Evangelism	Wiley Conference Center, Beverly, MA
10/14-16/25	Innovate 5 Gathering 4 - TBD	TBD
10/17-19/25	Boost Retreat with Barb Lemmel - Family Systems	St. Methodios Faith and Heritage Center, Contoocook, NH
TBD	2 sessions of ACTIVATE	TBD