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NEW BRUNSWICK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY LAUNCHES WELL PROGRAM TO HELP AFRICAN AMERICAN AND LATINX PASTORS THRIVE THROUGH PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

NEW BRUNSWICK, New Jersey – January 18, 2021 – Recognizing that pastors’ ability to serve, educate and inspire their congregations is deeply dependent on those pastoral leaders’ own spiritual, mental, and physical well-being, [New Brunswick Theological Seminary](#) (NBTS) has created the WELL Program.

Thanks to a generous grant of nearly one million dollars from [Lilly Endowment Inc.](#), NBTS, the oldest theological seminary in the U.S., with a strong tradition and rooting in the Reformed Church in America, designed the WELL Program to create a collaborative and supportive community for African American pastors leading urban congregations and Latinx pastors launching new churches.

“Pastors play a pivotal role in their congregations, and the demands on them are great in ordinary times, much less the extraordinary challenges faced in 2021,” said **Rev. Micah L. McCreary, PhD**, President, NBTS. “We created WELL with thoughtful input from pastors and with our three core principles of ‘think critically, act justly, and lead faithfully’ in mind. We believe this multi-faceted approach of assisting pastors who serve in two diverse ministries, African American and Latinx, will help revitalize their personal and professional ministry development and growth while creating a collaborative community.”

Drawing on his experience as an educator, psychologist, and pastor, Rev. Dr. McCreary noted that the pressures – spiritual, emotional, and financial – of urban pastoral leaders are magnified by the disproportionately high rate of COVID-19 among Black and Brown people.

“Although in service to the church and its members, pastoral ministry seeks to address the needs of the wider community,” he said. “The pastor’s role is to care for, nurture, and minister to the needs of all God’s people. We see WELL as a way to improve pastors’ resilience and overall well-being and grow their capacity for constructive outreach to congregants and the broader community.”

The program, which commences this year and runs through 2025, offers participants (four groups of 20 in two-year cycles for a total of 80) a wealth of personal, interactive, and educational resources. These include:

- **The WELL Team:** Developed by a core team of university and seminary professors, and pastors, the project will include a financial consultant, a church generosity strategist, and an urban planner, and brings together pastors, in person or virtually, for learning sessions and conferences.
- **WELL Learning Intensives:** Via Zoom, these are structured learning activities that strengthen mental health and leadership skills.

- **The WELL Conferences:** Conducted by NBTS faculty and staff as well as experts in the fields of church stewardship and real estate and finance, these will be in person or conducted online via Zoom.
- **The WELL Developmental Learning Plan (Capstone):** At the end of each group's first and second year, WELL fellows and/or WELL Teams will summarize their learning experiences and detail how these will be incorporated into their ministries.

A seasoned team with expertise in relevant fields will be involved in every step of WELL:

- **Denominational leaders:** Eddy Alemán (General Secretary, Reformed Church in America), Rev. Micah L. McCreary, PhD (President, NBTS)
- **Staff:** Dr. Gihane Jérémie-Brink, Dr. Jacqueline Madison-McCreary, Dr. Terry A. Smith
- **Consultants:** Jimmy Hanson (President & CEO, The Hampshire Companies), Carla Ray (Senior Generosity Strategist, Generis)

Gihane E. Jérémie-Brink, PhD, an Assistant Professor in the Graduate Program in Clinical and Counseling Psychology at The William Paterson University, serves as the WELL Program's Program Director. Dr. Jérémie-Brink drew on her extensive clinical experience as well as her academic research exploring racial and ethnic socialization and other racial-ethnic protective factors to design a program addressing shared core issues as well as those specific to African American or Latinx pastors.

"The term 'WELL,' though not an acronym, has theological, biblical, and psychological implications that matter to our project," said Dr. Jérémie-Brink. "First, WELL denotes what we propose to be the quality of the program – an excellent endeavor that through its very execution will foster and enhance wellness among both leaders and participants. Second, this biblical motif represents a place where God's people frequently gather and are met with the provision of God. One scriptural account depicts Jesus meeting a woman who was marginal to the religious community and describing himself as living water. The WELL program seeks to extend this metaphor into practice, where pastors find resources and respite. Third, the name reflects our project's inherent mission of promoting soundness of body and mind and personal satisfaction.

"Our primary aim for the project is to help participating pastors embrace and embody a mindset and lifestyle of WELL-ness in personal spirituality and self-care, leadership, authentic relationships and overall vitality."

WELL will continually evolve as pastors and consultants provide ongoing feedback. These will be incorporated into the program and enable NBTS to expose participants to different ways to minister in an urban context; provide new skill sets to help alleviate burnout, depression, and ministry exit; and produce innovative approaches to each pastor's ministry.

Sustainable long after the initial five years, many WELL participating pastors are part of NBTS' robust network of alumni, partners, and influencers who will continue to mentor and work with colleagues. As NBTS carries out its mandate of preparing effective leaders for the church, the seminary will integrate elements of WELL into its certificate, academic, and continuing education programs, with a particular focus in its pastoral care and counseling curriculum.

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About New Brunswick Theological Seminary

Founded in 1784, NBTS is the oldest seminary in the United States. It is one of two seminaries affiliated with the Reformed Church in America (RCA), and offers an exceptional seminary education, a flexible academic schedule, and a spiritually rich community for students of many Christian denominations and backgrounds. The Seminary offers Master of Divinity (M.Div.), Master of Arts (M.A.) and Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) degrees, as well as Professional Certificates to enhance the work and training of special ministers, church officers, and other Christian leaders. The seminary is located in New Brunswick, NJ, and operates a satellite campus at St. John's University in Queens, NY. To learn more, please visit www.nbts.edu.