



## Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education (NetVUE) Grants for Fostering Leadership for Communities of Faith

Awarded in March 2024 • Funding for 2024–2026

**Campbellsville University (KY)** will develop new partnerships with local worshipping communities to enhance the availability and quality of vocational exploration experiences (in the form of student internships) for students considering vocations in ministerial leadership. Concurrently, the program will introduce both a new course overviewing the vocation of ministry across traditions and a new academic minor in Christian Ministry to support vocational discernment and reflection for Campbellsville students, regardless of major.

**Dominican University (IL)** will enhance its current program for placing interns with local faith communities to increase capacity, to develop competency and evaluation frameworks, and to subsidize stipends for students who would otherwise be unable to participate due to economic hardship. The project aims to increase the quality of experiential learning, theological reflection, and community building connected to these internship placements. Through engagement in asset-based models of social transformation, students committed to a faith that does justice are called to reconsider who and how they are called to be in the world.

**Gordon College (MA)** will design and implement a certificate program for leaders in local congregations and for Gordon students discerning a call to ministry. This program will create a learning lab in which these students work alongside local congregational leaders to develop the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions to activate positive change in local churches and faith-based organizations. The initiative will incorporate the knowledge and guidance of recognized experts with experience aiding congregations as they navigate complex challenges.

**Hilbert College (NY)** will partner with local charity and human services organizations to implement a formational student internship program, offering opportunities for vocational exploration in mission-centered nonprofit work. During internship placements, weekly meetings with a mentor, monthly gatherings as a cohort, and an end-of-the-semester weekend retreat will support a deeper understanding of who students drawn to such work are truly called to become. Students enrolled in the program will examine issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion, as those principles surface within the progression of their internship experiences.

**Houghton University (NY)** will assemble and support a small cohort of undergraduate students to partner with the ministries of a local Wesleyan congregation in serving the needs of others and learning about the unique realities of rural poverty. Through this program, students will better understand rural poverty within the wider conversation of economic justice, engage in experiential learning opportunities in service of economically disadvantaged persons in the region, and disseminate their learning and experiences in ways that promote equitable economic practices.

**Huntington University (IN)**, as part of a multi-faceted strategy to enrich vocational exploration throughout the undergraduate experience, will implement a program to support students as they discern God's calling and to equip them for leadership in local faith communities. At the same time, this initiative will encourage the flourishing of local communities of faith by creating a pipeline of passionate young leaders and by strengthening partnerships between diverse communities of faith and the university.

**King University (TN)** will establish a "Vocational Scholars Program" to encourage student involvement in both ministry-specific and interfaith-related programs while providing new leadership and service experience with local faith communities. Scholars will enroll in common courses, work with a mentor in a local faith community, attend an annual retreat, assess needs within the faith community that they are serving, and design and implement a discernment-related project.

**Lipscomb University (TN)** will develop a new course for undergraduate students, offering experiences in diverse spaces and vocation-focused readings and reflection exercises to prepare future faith leaders. Travel will be an integral part of the course, including (a) visits to local communities of faith, with a focus on how faith leaders promote justice and reconciliation; (b) immersion experiences led by Nashville community leaders who serve populations in need; and (c) trips to historical sites commemorating important milestones in leadership for justice.

**Missouri Baptist University** will implement several strategic initiatives to foster future leaders for communities of faith and to help students mature in their vocational discernment. This program will develop new (and enhance existing) partnerships with local worship, mission, and

relief organizations and will establish student internship placements for cooperative mission and service projects. The university will also host a conference focused on equipping students with a better understanding of vocation and the connection between their sense of calling and local faith communities.

**Mount Vernon Nazarene University (OH)** will develop an academic program equipping students to serve communities of faith in urban settings. Built around a semester-long, immersive internship with an urban ministry center, the program will bring together academic reflection and experiential learning (in non-profit ministry, community development, and pastoral ministry) to form leaders for urban communities of faith. Students will engage in discernment during these placements through a mentoring relationship with an urban ministry pastor, developing their capacity to lead others in the pursuit of justice, reconciliation, and transformation in our cities.

**North Park University (IL)** will enroll up to sixteen undergraduate students from diverse backgrounds in paid internship and leadership development experiences with local faith communities. This new program is designed to foster deeper connections between students and local faith communities, to provide mentoring for students by local faith leaders, to offer service opportunities, and to organize individual and group reflection for students' vocational discernment.

**Saint Mary's College (IN)** will design a certificate program which seeks to provide an avenue for undergraduate students to cultivate interest in community leadership and social transformation through partnership with the Sisters of the Holy Cross, the college's founder and sponsor. The one-year program will be structured to provide vocational discernment and ministerial leadership formation to students of diverse faith backgrounds. The program includes an opening retreat, mentoring, and advanced theological coursework.

**Samford University (AL)** will design a center aiming to empower young people through transformative mentorship and discernment environments with faith leaders. The program will invite undergraduate students across various disciplines in the arts (including music, visual art, graphic design, film production, dramatic art, and dance) to foster deeper connections with a local church, offer opportunities for vocational discernment, and empower students to contribute to the worship life of local churches through specific, arts-based projects.

**Stillman College (AL)** will build a program for a small cohort of students with a focus on the theological concept of *witness* as applied and explored through worship and economic justice. Through leadership roles in local churches and campus chapel programming, students will be formed for their future vocations through practices of intergenerational worship. Concurrently, through workshops, guest speakers, and ongoing mentored conversation, students will learn how

local inequality in economic advantage affects family cohesion, housing, healthcare, crime rates, education, and social mobility.

**The University of Dallas (TX)** will implement a program of evening courses, webinars, and other digital resources for students who are considering a transition from retirement or a current career and are discerning a call to leadership for faith communities. In guiding those students who are not seeking degrees—especially those who expect to lead in diverse settings—this program will empower non-traditional undergraduates for a second calling in faith leadership and will provide an ongoing network of support for successful transition to this calling.

**University of Saint Joseph (CT)** will develop and implement a pilot program for 20 parishioners from four partner churches serving large minority populations in the local area. This comprehensive program for adult learners will allow second-career or retiring adults, who are discerning a call to leadership in faith communities, to participate in adult enrichment courses with opportunities for spiritual development and ministerial leadership. Led by university faculty members and guest speakers, the retreat-style courses will be scheduled in three-hour Saturday blocks during the academic year.

**University of St. Thomas (MN)** will build a program offering semester-long internships mentored by lay faith leaders who are actively working within local Hispanic parishes. This program aims to support ongoing student formation through gatherings that foster learning, reflection, and vocational discernment for these undergraduates, and seeks to address the pastoral needs and ecclesial realities of their parishes. This program will enhance ongoing engagement with local worshipping communities and provide emerging leaders from those communities with structured mentorship opportunities to deepen their vocational reflection and continue their ministry effectively after graduation.

**University of the Ozarks (AR)** will establish a summer internship program that pairs four students with two local congregations. Interns will work in pairs within these congregations, collaborating with each other and with congregational members to support various ministries. After a period, the students will switch placements to gain experience in a different congregational setting. This rotation aims to provide students with a broad perspective on how different faith communities address their own needs and those of the wider community. The program's goal is to offer formative experiences across diverse contexts, helping students discern their calling and better understand how their gifts and strengths can be effectively utilized in various settings.