

## **Engaged Scholars Studying Congregations**

### **A Program of Mentoring, Networking, and Research Support**

Supported by the Lilly Endowment, Inc.

For more than twenty-five years, the Congregational Studies Project Team has led the way in inviting scholars to engage in serious, rigorous research on congregational life and encouraging religious leaders to draw on academic research to enrich their ability to provide effective leadership to local religious communities. During the next three years, the Team invites **younger scholars and religious leaders**, from any discipline, whose focus is on the **practices of local communities of faith**, to enter into a **program of research and networking**. Participants can enhance their ability to do excellent research that will also provide the wisdom with which gatherings of faithful people and their leaders can see more clearly and act more faithfully. In particular, participants will have the opportunity to:

- Hone research skills that allow them to take the life of faith communities seriously;
- Build a network of interlocutors and mentors who can read and evaluate their work;
- Build a cohort of colleagues who can encourage and stimulate each other in advancing understanding of how engaged scholarship works best; and
- Gain support for significant research and writing and the time to do it.

Since the summer of 2005, the first three cohorts of three “fellows” each were selected by and interacted with the Team. A “coach”—a senior scholar in the person’s field, either from the Team or beyond—worked with each fellow, especially in developing a network of conversation partners and sharpening the research. The project now entertains proposals for the fourth cohort of fellows who will gather with their coaches during two successive summer Team meetings and one fall conference, thereby allowing both a deep conversation about their work and an extension of their networks across overlapping cohorts of fellows, coaches, and clergy and religious leaders.

This round of fellowships will run from 1 June 2008 through 31 December 2009. Fellows will receive **research stipends of \$9,000 for each of the two summers**, plus **consultation travel funding of \$2,000 during the fellowship period** to enhance networking capacity, such as visiting the assigned coach or consulting with another fitting conversation partner. In addition, all expenses associated with the two summer Team meetings and fall conference will be covered, and a small stipend for supplies and books provided.

**Who should apply?** Relatively new (generally pre-tenure) faculty members in theological schools, colleges, and universities are urged to apply. Likewise, leaders working in religious organizations are welcome to take advantage of this opportunity to enhance their work. In addition, more established scholars who are “re-tooling” to do significantly new kinds of work may also wish to apply.

**What sorts of questions do we hope might be addressed?** Any topic touching on the practices of congregational life is welcome. Such topics might include:

- What is the role of local faith communities in confronting a world (or a community) in distress? How can they see their task more clearly?
- How do congregations engage with and creatively reinterpret historic religious traditions? What impact does this have on members’ lives?
- How can we understand the basic ritual practices that bind a community together and direct their attention toward God?
- How do sermons shape (or fail to shape) the life of a congregation?
- How do congregations influence everyday decision-making?
- How do faith communities form their children in a faith tradition?

**What is expected of fellows?** By the end of the fellowship period, each fellow will have completed an article-length publishable piece that is either itself aimed at religious leaders or for which there is a clear plan for a secondary adaptation. Each fellow will also work specifically with his or her coach to address both the academic and practical challenges of engaged scholarship and to enlarge the fellow's network of interlocutors.

During the fellowship period, **attendance by fellows is mandatory at three meetings.**

(a) At the summer meeting of the first fellowship year (set for 27-30 July 2008 on Cape Cod, Mass.), each participant will present a summary of her or his research plans. (b) During the fall of 2008 (date to be determined), a conference of scholars, clergy, religious leaders, and others will be held to expand the network of people concerned about engaged scholarship in congregations. (c) During the summer meeting of the second fellowship year (date to be determined), fellows will present drafts of the written products of their research. They will also contribute a brief essay on the particular challenges of doing engaged scholarship of the type they have undertaken. These essays will focus a variety of conversations about how this kind of work can continue to be encouraged and supported.

**What is the application process?** Complete applications for the 2008-2009 cohort of fellows are due no later than **1 February 2008**. To be considered complete, applications must include the following four materials:

- (1) A brief essay (not more than five double-spaced pages) detailing the particular research and writing you wish to undertake and the way that research will grow out of and affect local communities of faith.
- (2) A budget outlining expected uses for the \$18,000 research stipend. This may either be direct research expenses, summer salary replacement(s), and/or other materials or activities that will enhance the goals of your work.
- (3) A copy of your curriculum vitae.
- (4) The names and contact information for two persons you have asked to write letters of support. One of these should be from someone such as a dean or department chair who can express the endorsement of your institution for your participation in this program. *Applicants are responsible for ensuring that these letters themselves are sent directly by your recommenders to the project office by the deadline.*

Send materials to [engagedscholars@hartsem.edu](mailto:engagedscholars@hartsem.edu). With the exception of letters of support, *electronic submission using e-mail attachment is the only accepted form of submission.*

Letters of support *only* should be mailed to the project office at:

Engaged Scholars  
c/o Hartford Institute for Religion Research  
Hartford Seminary  
77 Sherman Street  
Hartford, CT 06105.

**Awards will be announced no later than 1 April 2008.**

**The Congregational Studies Team** includes: Nancy Ammerman (Boston University), Nancy Eiesland (Emory University), Larry Mamiya (Vassar College), Bill McKinney (Pacific School of Religion), Omar McRoberts (University of Chicago), James Nieman (Hartford Seminary) Robert Schreiter (Catholic Theological Union), Stephen Warner (University of Illinois, Chicago), and Jack Wertheimer (Jewish Theological Seminary).