

Baylor helps churches explore vocation and calling

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WACO—As churches seek to help members discover God’s calling on their lives, they face three key challenges—to involve multiple generations in ministry, provide long-term religious education and teach Christians how to apply their faith in day-to-day experiences, according to initial findings of Baylor University’s Soundings project.

Baylor recently completed the first year of the five-year project, funded by a \$1.5 million grant from the Lilly Endowment, designed to help churches explore how God calls Christians to lives of meaning and purpose.



Darin Davis

“The first year was the listening phase, and it was spent in discussion with denominational leaders and congregations,” said Darin Davis, vice president for university mission at Baylor and director of the university’s Institute for Faith and Learning.

Based on the Soundings project listening sessions, Davis pointed to three key areas of concern:

- **Connect generations in congregational life.** Churches asked how to develop intergenerational communities where senior adults and median-aged adults mentor young Christians and members are involved in cross-generational ministries.
- **Provide religious education.** Churches said they want to discover meaningful ways to offer basic religious education, ongoing discipleship and lifelong biblical instruction.
- **Apply faith in action.** Churches expressed a desire to help members move from listening to biblical principles espoused in Sunday morning sermons to living out their faith and discovering their own ministries.

Baylor to serve as ‘innovation hub’ for 15 churches

The Soundings project will enable Baylor’s Institute for Faith and Learning—working in cooperation with the Center for Ministry Effectiveness at Truett Theological Seminary, the university’s office of ministry guidance and the Baptist General Convention of Texas—to serve as an innovation hub for 15 congregations in Texas.

They will include nine BGCT-affiliated congregations, along with two Catholic, two mainline Protestant and two nondenominational churches representing diverse socio-economic, geographic and ethnic backgrounds.

Baylor has spent the last year in conversation with leaders of congregations that could be among the 15 churches the university will work with over the next four years to develop innovative ways to explore issues of vocation and calling, Davis said.

“We are in a mutual discernment process now,” he explained, noting the university likely will identify the 15 Texas congregations within the next two months.

“Baylor will come alongside those churches in a Barnabas role, encouraging and enabling the partner congregations to develop new models and approaches to reclaim and deepen a biblical understanding of vocation as calling,” Davis said.

Called to Lives of Purpose and Meaning

Baylor is one of 13 institutions in the United States working with the Lilly Endowment’s Called to Lives of Purpose and Meaning Initiative, he noted. The initiative seeks to create innovation hubs that will help churches design and launch new ministries or enhance existing ministries to inspire and support Christians as they discover God’s calling.

“The Lilly Endowment sees flourishing congregational life as key to the flourishing of families, communities and society,” Davis said.

The Soundings project aims “to support the common work of the Christian university and the church” and grows out of Baylor’s motto—*Pro Ecclesia, Pro Texana* (For the church, For Texas), he added.

Churches will have opportunities to “think deeply, theologically and creatively about what it means for God to call us to lead lives of meaning and purpose,” Davis noted. At the same time, Baylor will learn from the congregations and share its findings both with scholarly and lay audiences.

“We hope to explore and nurture, along with congregations throughout the state, new models and approaches to the enduring question: ‘How is God calling me—and us—to be faithful?’” Davis said.