

What to Know Before Applying

Vinery (n): an area or building in which new vines are grown¹

What is The Vinery?

1. An initiative nurturing congregational thriving in university ministry.
2. A greenhouse-style network cultivating dynamic cohorts of university proximate congregations.

Mission: *Awakening faith and flourishing at the intersection of church and university through deep listening and purposeful design.*

Our Story of Self

The Vinery is a subsidiary of Mere Christianity Forum (MCF) - a unique collegiate ministry and resource hub located at the crossroads of faith, reason, and tomfoolery. MCF operates in two primary forms: a collegiate ministry at Furman University in Greenville, SC which promotes the thoughtful exploration of Christian faith through conversation and community and a collegiate ministry resource hub (collegiateministries.com) developing just, vibrant, and inclusive 21st century collegiate ministry resources.

We have a vision for creating contexts where young adults are given dynamic opportunities to explore the depth and breadth of the Christian tradition, empowering them to discern for themselves a vision and a version of Christian faithfulness that they can live into with integrity.

In 2021, we launched *The Vinery: Awakening Faith and Flourishing at the Intersection of Church and University* to cultivate congregational thriving in collegiate ministry with university neighbors and broader communities.

Our Story of Us

In the face of complex, widespread societal suffering, inequity, and injustice, many institutions are withering, particularly churches, universities, and seminaries. It is therefore no surprise that the greatest age-group participation gap in churches is among college-aged young adults.

At The Vinery, we believe that when thriving churches and vibrant universities commit to serving the common good, the torn fabric of American life can begin to be rewoven. This important work is manifest when these vital institutions prioritize the cultivation of healthy human beings serving the

¹ *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. “vinery,” accessed March 3, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vinery>.

common good in the likeness of Christ. We seek to partner with congregations committed to this important work.

Our Story of Now

The time has come for a renewed vision of congregational thriving in mission and ministry with university neighbors.

We invite you to join us in a narrative process of *listening* deeply to your university neighbors and members of your broader community; *reflecting* on your congregation's history, theology, and practices; and *reimagining*, with God, your congregation's emerging story of thriving in ministry with young adults, university neighbors, and your broader community.

Our process is grounded in the methodology of *Public Narrative Sharing*, developed by professor Marshall Ganz.



Is The Vinery right for your church?

- Is there a university within a mile or two of your church or a <10 minute public transportation ride?
- Does your congregation prioritize ministry with your university neighbors?
- Do you long for your church to become a dynamic hub of vibrant ministry serving people from a neighboring university?
- Is your church already doing great ministry with its university neighbors, but interested in a process and partners to help take your ministry to the next level?
- If your congregation isn't yet thriving in university ministry, have you set a strategic priority of investing in university ministry, especially with college-aged young adults, in the next three to five years?
- Are you interested in helping lead your congregation through a process of discernment, storytelling, and strategic action in ministry with young adults and university neighbors?

If you answered yes to any of the above, we invite you to examine how joining The Vinery might empower your congregation to embody your calling for university ministry.

NOTE: It is important that applicants understand that our vision for cultivating congregational thriving in **university ministry**, not just college student ministry. We define university ministry as robust ministry in service to college students, staff, faculty, and others from the wider campus community.

What is congregational thriving?

There are three core characteristics of congregational thriving, identified by the Lilly Endowment Inc.², that are essential for candidates to be considered for the The Vinery initiative.

Congregations must:

1. Recognize their changing social and cultural contexts
2. Exhibit clarity of values and mission
3. Cultivate Christian practices

² <http://lillyendowment.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/thriving-congregations-rfp.pdf>

Is God calling your church to join the work of The Vinery?

Before applying for The Vinery's cohort, please read and seriously consider the criteria and commitments detailed below.

The Vinery has developed indicators of congregational readiness that build upon the Lilly Endowment's three characteristics of thriving congregations: **Proximity, Priority, and Capacity.**

Proximity

The Vinery aims to partner with congregations located within close physical proximity to universities. We define close proximity as within walking distance, within one to two miles, or an easily accessible public transit ride that is ten minutes or less.

Priority

The Vinery is intended for congregations that either already prioritize vibrant college and young adult ministry or that have a strategic plan to implement such a ministry in the next three to five years.

Congregations that are ideal for this work are clear about their values and exhibit evidence of their fruit-bearing work in the world.

The Vinery team recognizes that congregations within each cohort will have a variety of strategic visions, theological moorings, and levels of development in their current collegiate ministries.

Strong applicants for this initiative are any of the below:

1. Congregations that have set as a priority in their three to five year strategic plan, to establish or revitalize or grow their university ministry offerings; OR
2. Congregations that already have established a collegiate ministry and want to expand to a thriving *university* ministry footprint; OR
3. Congregations that have experienced a decline in a once thriving collegiate or university ministry, and are looking to reimagine and revitalize; OR
4. Collegiate ministries that are established and thriving, and sense a call to evolve into a congregational ministry.

Capacity

It is important that applicants understand what is required for active participation in the 24-month Vinery cohort experience. Strong candidates are congregations that demonstrate a willingness to commit to the following:

- **Self-reflection** on their mission, values, theological resources and trustworthy ministry practices.
- **Cultural competence** around issues of race, justice, equity, and narratives of dominant culture in their congregations and in ministry with their university neighbors.
- **Financial investment** in covering expenses for participation in a 24 month cohort experience and emerging network of congregations committed to dynamic university ministry.
- **Developing a lead team** to guide their congregation through the multi-step process, representing their congregation in The Vinery cohort, and communicate their work consistently to their congregation.
- **Time** for retreats, listening sessions, and congregational engagement during the two-year Vinery cohort experience.

In order to join in The Vinery initiative, congregations will need to identify their lead team, including a clergyperson or staff person, a lay leader, and one university student or young adult, by November 2023. A clergyperson is one who is seminary trained, ordained, and in good standing with the denomination to which he/she belongs. A lay leader is a representative of the congregation who has been vested with responsibility and authority to lead laity—whether they have existing responsibilities or are newly appointed for work with The Vinery. A lead team must also include a university student or related young adult committed to regular engagement within the congregation. This member of the team should be a sophomore or junior university student and/or within the ages of 18-25 but does not have to be a member of the congregation.

The intersectional work of congregational engagement, relationship building with university neighbors, and cohort collaboration requires congregations to select a lead team that will remain the same during the entire two-year cohort experience, if at all possible. If a congregation must make changes to team members, they must notify The Vinery in writing and go through the team member change process.

Each Vinery Lead Team will be expected to:

- Guide their congregation through the multi-step process of *listening, reflecting, and reimagining* their congregation's story of thriving in ministry with their university neighbors.

- Represent their congregation in The Vinery cohort community and communicate The Vinery vision and their team’s work to their congregation.
- Attend monthly coaching sessions and collaborative learning calls with their Vinery Cohort.
- Record and share their journey with members of The Vinery team on a quarterly basis.

Vinery Cohort Member Benefits:

- Annual in-person retreat with the full cohort of Vinery Lead Teams.
- Annual in-person on-site visit with peer Lead Team for mutual learning.
- Bi-Monthly virtual cohort learning experiences.
- The Vinery resource manual for Congregational Thriving in University Ministry (online and physical resources).
- Membership in an emerging network of churches committed to thriving university ministries.
- Hard skills training for community listening; congregation based theological reflection and discernment; just, equitable, and inclusive university ministries; and Marshall Ganz framework for Public Narrative Sharing process.
- Monthly Lead Team Leadership Coaching.

Vinery Cohort Member Congregation Investments:

- **\$250/monthly** Vinery Cohort membership fee.
- Travel expenses for attending annual Vinery Cohort retreats (January/February).
- Travel expenses for attending one mid-year peer Lead Team gathering in July (alternate year a peer team will visit your congregational context).
- Funds necessary for investing in specific university ministries (to be discerned by each unique congregation through The Vinery process).

Ideal congregations will possess an interest in and commitment to anchoring an emerging network of congregations engaged in dynamic university ministries, sharing their learnings, and supporting each other's ongoing success after the completion of their initial two-year cohort experience with The Vinery.

*The Vinery reserves the right to discontinue a congregation’s cohort membership if a congregation fails to uphold their participation commitments for a sustained period of time.

Vinery Gathering Dates

As you consider applying, please note the following dates :

- Opening Retreat January 28-31, 2024
- Mid-Year Peer Learning Cohort July-August 2024
- Learning Community Gatherings TBD