



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 ministry with their university neighbors; and
2. A greenhouse for 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.*

The Story of Self

Mere Christianity Forum is a unique collegiate ministry and resource hub located at the crossroads of faith, reason, and tomfoolery. We operate in two primary forms: a collegiate ministry at Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina, promoting the thoughtful exploration of Christian faith through conversation and community; and a college and young adult ministry resource hub called collegiateministries.com developing just, vibrant, and inclusive 21st century college and young adult ministry resources.

Our vision is that by creating contexts where young adults are given dynamic opportunities to explore the depth and breadth of the Christian tradition, they are empowered to discern for themselves a vision and a version of Christian faithfulness they live into with integrity.

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

The Story of Us

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

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 happens anytime these vital institutions form healthy human beings serving the common good in the likeness of Christ.

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

What to Know Before Applying

We look to partner with congregations committed to this important work!

The Story of Now

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

We invite you to join us in a narrational process of **listening** deeply to your university neighbors and members of your broader community; **reflecting** on your congregation's history, theology, and practices; then **reimagining** your congregation's 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 that was developed by Marshall Ganz.



Source: 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?



What to Know Before Applying

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 already thriving in university ministry, has your congregation set a strategic priority of investing in its university ministries, 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 deep discernment, storytelling, and strategic actions in ministry with young adults and your university neighbors?

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?

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, are:

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

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

Before applying for The Vinery's first 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. They are: 1. Proximity 2. Priority and 3. Capacity

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



What to Know Before Applying

Proximity

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

Priority

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

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

The Vinery team recognizes that congregations within a cohort will have a variety of strategic visions, theological moorings, and different statuses in their current ministry with their university neighbors.

Strong applicants for this initiative are:

1. Congregations that have already established a collegiate ministry and want to expand to a thriving university ministry;
2. Congregations that have experienced a decline in a once thriving collegiate or university ministry, and are looking to reimagine and revitalize; or
3. 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.



What to Know Before Applying

- **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 begin The Vinery initiative, congregations will need to have their lead team in place, which is to include: a clergyperson, a lay leader, and one university student or related young adult. A clergy person 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. A lead team must include a university student or related young adult who has committed to regular attendance and service 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. In the event that a lead team needs to make changes to members of their team, the congregation must notify The Vinery in writing and go through the team member change process.

The Vinery reserves the right to revoke a congregation's cohort membership if more than one person of a lead team is changed during the tenure of the contract.

Each 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 young adults, university neighbors, and broader community.
- Represent their congregation in the Vinery cohort community; and communicate the vision and their work to their congregation consistently.
- Attend monthly coaching sessions and collaborative learning calls with a Listening Cohort.
- Record and share their journey with members of The Vinery team at least quarterly.



What to Know Before Applying

Vinery Cohort Member Benefits:

- Annual in-person retreat with full cohort of 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 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
- Monthly Lead Team Leadership Coaching

Vinery Cohort Member Congregation Investments:

- \$200/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 one another's ongoing success after the completion in The Vinery two-year cohort experience.

(The Vinery reserves the right to discontinue a congregation's cohort membership if a congregation fails to uphold the participation commitments for a sustained period of time.)



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2022 The Vinery Gatherings

As you consider applying, please note the following dates :

- Opening Retreat Jan 30th-Feb 2nd, 2022; Jan 29th-Feb 1st 2023
- Mid-Year Peer Learning Cohort July 17th-20th, 2022; July 16th-19th, 2023
- Learning Communities Select Tuesdays, 10 AM - 12 PM EST

Virtual Sessions via Video Conference in 2022:

- January 18
- March 15
- April 19
- May 17
- June 21
- August 16
- September 20
- October 18
- November 15

*2023 dates TBD