



# Congregational Participation Guidelines

## **Cohort Year 1 Qualifications**

*A best practice congregation...*

- Is not a “best practice” congregation because of its size or the number of children in its context, but because of its intention around creating space for, and affirming the gifts of, the youngest members of its community.
- Creates intergenerational space for children, ages 0-12 years of age, in the context of corporate worship and prayer, or significantly in the life of their community. Views children, including ages 0-12, as spiritual beings that need to be sustained through worship and prayer;
- Values the wisdom of children and believes there is much children can teach us, rather than seeing children as receptacles for our own set ideas of church and faith;
- Celebrates diversity (even if the diversity is not within their own context);
- Emphasizes a faith life that extends beyond the four walls of the church - that worship and prayer extend beyond our worship hour/Sunday School classrooms;
- Values relationship-oriented approaches to programming. In other words, engagement with the children extends to the care and cultivation of their spiritual journey and not just their participation in programming;
- When possible, has more people involved in caring for the youngest in their midst than the designated teacher/director; when possible there are multiple people participating in the mentorship of children and youth;
- Is intentional about fostering positive relationships with parents and caregivers;
- Recognizes the gifts of children and the diversity of those gifts as integral to the life of their community and spaces of worship.

*A best practice congregation does not have to have all of these qualities, but these should serve to guide you as you consider your nomination for our “Best Practice” cohort.*

Do you know a Best Practice Congregation you would like to nominate for our first cohort of churches? [Nominate them here](#) using the link or QR code.

From the nominations received, congregations will be invited to apply to participate in the first cohort of the Nurturing Children Initiative. Of these applicants, twelve churches will ultimately be chosen to fulfill the first cohort of the Nurturing Children Initiative.



## **Regular Meeting Commitment**

The Congregations of the Nurturing Children Initiative (NCI) will meet regularly together with an ABHMS facilitator and an assigned coach. The requirements for participation are:

- One in-person retreat at the Leadership and Mission Building (LAMB) in King of Prussia, PA. Lodging and meals will be arranged and covered by the Nurturing Children Initiative for up to three representatives of your congregational team. Members of participating congregations may include children, but any child must be accompanied by a legally responsible caregiver or adult.
- Six Zoom retreats; three representatives from each congregation will gather via Zoom for collegial networking and support, workshops and learning opportunities related to child development/child psychology, and best practices, as well as peer learning, prayer, brainstorming, troubleshooting, etc.
- Six Coaching sessions – each cohort congregation will have access to an assigned coach, who will come alongside them as they develop creative ideas, methods, and practices to best engage the youngest members of their communities (ages 0-12 years) in intergenerational worship and prayer, and as they prepare to submit grant applications, and implement congregational grant projects
- Engagement with the Nurturing Children Initiative and NCI cohort through email correspondence and designated virtual platforms.
- Completion of required and suggested readings as a part of the cohort proceedings.

## **Why Cohort-Based Learning?**

When congregations commit to a cohort-based experience, they join a community of practice that emphasizes reciprocal peer learning. This cohort-based strategy facilitates



an especially important element of collegiality and community building for our autonomous Baptist congregations for whom association must be created and chosen rather than mandated by a centralized authority. ABHMS believes that this model and its efficacy are rooted in our strengths-based strategy for congregational engagement. American Baptist congregations trust ABHMS because we do not examine congregational challenges from the outside and then dictate solutions, rather we believe all congregations have valuable kingdom-building gifts and wisdom to share. Our cohort-based programs acknowledge, affirm, and draw from congregations' relational and contextual expertise while providing time, space, and thought partners to support the innovation process.

## **QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS**

Email [nurturingchildren@abhms.org](mailto:nurturingchildren@abhms.org)