

FELLOWSHIP NEWS

National Association of Evangelicals

Financial Health

Solutions for Pastors & Churches

FEC Partners with NAE to Provide Financial Resources & Grants

Pastors face unique financial challenges. In 2016, the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) published a study that focused on financial health for pastors in the United States. According to their research:

- 90% of pastors are experiencing financial stress (which has increased since COVID-19).
- 60% of pastors receive no retirement, health-care or employee benefits.
- 30% of pastors have student loan debt averaging \$36,000.
- 33% of pastors have under \$10,000 in retirement funds.

Recognizing this unique burden on pastors, the Lilly Endowment has partnered with organizations like the NAE in the National Initiative to Address Economic Challenges Facing Pastoral Leaders. Through the initiative, NAE created financial health resources and grants for pastors. FEC began offering the program to pastors in 2017 which includes a grant for both retirement funds and student loan repayment. This year, three pastors have applied for the funds, but 17 grants are still available.

The NAE partnership addresses one particular financial burden that pastors often face—student loan debt. Because pastors usually attend private Christian colleges or seminaries to prepare for ministry roles, they enter the ministry with student loans. Christopher L. Coble, vice president for religion at Lilly Endowment said, “Pastors, especially those just beginning in ministry, accept low salaries as part of their commitment to God and to church. Many enter ministry with significant debt from their undergraduate and seminary years and often have little financial resiliency when financial emergencies arise.”

In October, churches across the U.S. showed appreciation to their pastor(s) during Clergy Appreciation Month. One way to continue showing their appreciation is through the NAE program “Bless Your Pastor,” a NAE resource that lists 50 ways to bless a pastor and church staff. “Over 50 Ways to Bless Your Pastor and Staff” can be downloaded at blessyourpastor.org. The list includes ideas like sharing your skills to help them, providing meals or gift cards, babysitting, and praying for them which supports church leaders beyond the paycheck they receive.

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Welcome to FEC The Leaders Orientation

Leaders Orientation Connects New Church Leaders to FEC, Other Leaders

Twice each year, FEC welcomes pastors and church staff who are newer to the fellowship by hosting a two-day event called “Welcome to FEC: The Leaders Orientation.” In October, 25 new staff heard about the history, beliefs, vision, and heart of FEC.

Ryan Woldman attended the recent Leaders Orientation after joining the staff at Pine Hills Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana, in July. In his new role as Communications Lead, he brings 15 years of experience from the business sector in branding, marketing, design, and creative management. But, over the last five years, Ryan has had a growing desire to help churches have a greater mission impact. During the Leaders Orientation, he discovered the way that churches within the FEC provide a network to support one another. He said, “I learned about the different ways that FEC churches are impacting communities, but they are all aligned by the same vision and goals. They are diverse and doing missions in different ways, but they are still the hands and feet of Jesus.”

Another aspect of the Leaders Orientation that Ryan observed was the culture that FEC develops among its churches and leaders. He learned that many of the church leaders have been a part of FEC for years and talk to one another often. At the event, he reconnected with a former business associate, Eric Hall who is now FEC Director of Communications and Church Relations. Ryan said, “Eric is a thought-partner, someone to share ideas with and ask advice about marketing. That’s what FEC is to me.”

Church Planters Assessment Center: A Unique Approach to Church Planting

A Lifeway research study conducted in 2019 found that fewer churches were started in 2019 than the number of protestant churches that closed their doors for good. However, the Fellowship of Evangelical Churches (FEC) lives by the calling to “establish reproducing churches worldwide” and adds new churches every year. Currently, 10 active church plants are being established in the United States. FEC takes a unique approach to church planting by first helping men and women determine if they are called and equipped to plant a new church. That unique process is the Church Planters Assessment Center (CPAC). In October, CPAC hosted three couples to help them determine whether they have the skills and competencies necessary to plant and lead a new church.

Seven FEC leaders and pastors worked alongside the couples to assess their spiritual health, readiness, and next steps. One of the assessors, Matt Lehmann, attended CPAC in 2019 as a participant. Currently, he works at Crossview Church as a Pastoral Resident until he plants a church. Matt has participated in other church planting organizations, and he believes that CPAC stands out for the way that they approach potential church planters, describing FEC’s approach as “shepherding, caring, and Spirit-led.” He said, “If you feel passionate about church planting, investigate it. God may be doing something. Come to CPAC to see what God may be leading you to do.”

The next CPAC will be in Spring, 2022.

