



DAKOTA WESLEYAN
UNIVERSITY

Nonprofit Church Leadership

**2018-2019
PILOT PROGRAM IMPACT REPORT**



The need for comprehensive church administration education

In his 2011 book, “Church Administration,” Robert Welch reports that of 148 theological institutions surveyed, 84% required no administrative training and only 2.7% required any sort of leadership and administration courses for MDiv graduates. Since the book’s release in 2011, many seminaries have supplemented their curriculum to address administrative skills, but it’s often a course or two at best.

In the majority of small and medium-sized churches throughout the Midwest, pastors are called to serve well beyond the pulpit. A pastor’s daily activity often involves administrative meetings, dealing with personnel, leading financial development efforts, and overseeing marketing and outreach obligations to their congregation and beyond. With declining church attendance coupled with shrinking church budgets, there are rarely increases in staff to assist pastors in these administrative efforts. Today’s pastors often lack the administrative support their predecessors enjoyed only a generation ago. It is essential for today’s pastor to continue to develop competencies across a range of administrative areas throughout his or her career.

An answer to prayer

Seeing a need to expand the financial development and management acumen of pastors in the rural Midwest, representatives from the Dakotas and Minnesota Conferences and Foundations of the United Methodist Church approached Dakota Wesleyan University (DWU) to propose the development of a comprehensive program for working pastors. This program would strengthen their knowledge, skills, and confidence in a range of administrative and leadership areas. Conference and Foundation representatives met with the university’s academic leadership in the fall of 2017 and by the summer of 2018, DWU was prepared to welcome an initial cohort of pastors into a year-long graduate certificate program in Nonprofit Church Leadership.

The program

Program developers worked with pastors, field experts, and conference leadership to design comprehensive content aligned with the schedules and calendars of working pastors, complemented by structured learning activities that directly served their professional needs. The product of these efforts is a year-long program for pastors who earn 21 graduate credit hours in nonprofit administration.

The primary program outcomes are:

1. Increasing pastoral leaders' **confidence** as organizational leaders.
2. Increasing pastoral leaders' **capacity** as effective organizational administrators.

Class content, applied project emphases, and learning outcomes are grouped into overarching administrative areas:

- Financial development and management
- Governance and human resource management
- Strategy and organizational effectiveness
- Communications and community outreach

The program features four 12-week online courses and two comprehensive applied projects (worth three credits each). The applied projects are designed to deliver significant impact and church improvement in one or more areas of administration covered throughout the program. Each pastor partners with a qualified coach who is a subject matter expert, and who offers support throughout the duration of the program. Students, administrators, and faculty/coaches gather three times throughout the year for 2-day sessions to engage in leadership development workshops, project presentations, and communal worship.

Pilot cohort

The Dakotas and Minnesota Conferences and Foundations of the United Methodist Church worked with their district superintendents, Bishop, and various church leaders to nominate and/or encourage pastor participation in the program. Program tuition was covered, in part, by a grant from the Lilly Endowment, the Dakotas and Minnesota Foundations of the United Methodist Church, and, in part, from personal and church contributions.

Basic demographic information about pastors and churches involved in the pilot cohort

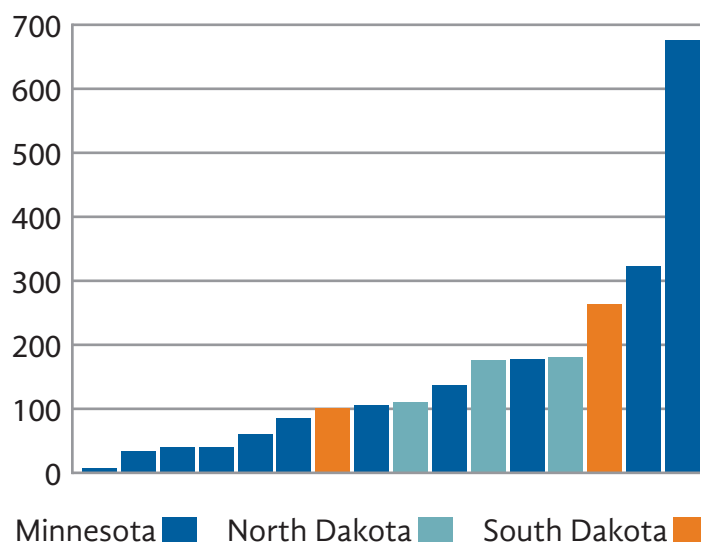
Participants by State



Participants by Church Location



Church Size (in average attendance)



Eighteen students were selected for the first cohort. Fifteen students completed the program. One student was not pastoring a local church, but participated as a clergy person appointed to administration in a conference office. The remaining 14 graduates represented small and medium-sized churches from across South Dakota, Minnesota, and North Dakota. The smallest church completing the program had seven in regular attendance and the largest had 676 average attendance. One of the pastors led a four-point charge in rural Minnesota. The participating pastors' churches were in a variety of locations across the tri-state area, ranging from suburban communities of 150,000 to rural towns of fewer than 800. 88% of pastors had been in their appointments for 5 years or fewer. 12% for 5-10 years.



Students in the program represented churches across South Dakota, Minnesota, and North Dakota.

Pre- and post-program data was analyzed from 10 of the 15 pastors who completed the program.

Program impact measures:

Various methods were employed to measure impact of the nonprofit church leadership program. These included pre- and post-program surveys of both participating pastors and leaders at the churches of participating pastors; post-course surveys for each 12-week class; surveys to evaluate in-person gatherings; focus groups; analyzing data collected from applied project reports; and course assessment using rubrics and grades as measures of effectiveness.



The 2018-2019 pilot cohort in class.

Evidence of impact:

There is an abundance of evidence illustrating the program's positive impact on the participating pastors and their churches. Highlights are below and grouped according to the overarching areas of program emphasis.

Area One: Financial Development and Management:

One of the 12-week classes was devoted to financial development and management. Assignments and learning activities included: developing a logic model for a grant, examining feasibility studies (in conjunction with prospective capital campaigns), simulating a major gift request with a prospective donor, and creating (or revising) an annual report tell the church story through financial data. Of these assignments, 80% of students scored 90% or better and student self-reflection demonstrated mastery.

“I found this assignment [logic modeling for a grant] takes a special kind of thinking. It involves strategic planning, long range visioning and technical writing/thinking. It was challenging as this is not the analytical process that I normally take when mapping out a system in the church or thinking through a strategic plan.

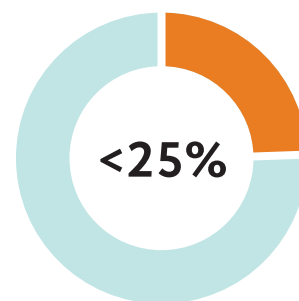
– Pastor participant of 2018-2019 inaugural DWU NPCL cohort

“Another overarching theme of this class is that people relate to stories and not as well to numbers (in many cases). A narrative budget can tell our hopes and dreams for the coming year. A line-item budget also should accompany a narrative budget.”

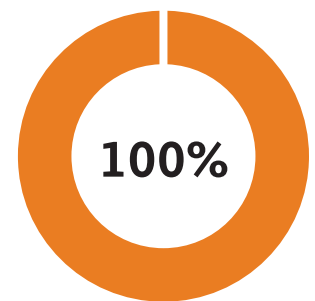
– Pastor participant of 2018-2019 inaugural DWU NPCL cohort

As a group, the pastors completed eleven 24-week applied projects that focused, in whole or in part, on strengthening year-round generosity and/or improving financial management strategies within the church. Across these eleven projects, 95 new giving units were generated and over \$500,000 in new gifts was recorded. Applied projects focused on establishing new channels of giving, overhauling budget management and financial reporting techniques, and launching capital campaigns. One pastor reported receiving \$90,000 during Miracle Sunday, a gift which, by itself, pushed the campaign nearly 15% beyond their goal. Another pastor reported that a donor pledged two \$100,000 gifts after experiencing evidence of strengthened stewardship principles at the church.

Percent of pastors with self-reported knowledge and confidence in financial stewardship



Before NPCL Program



After NPCL Program

A comparison of pre- and post-survey data reveals significant positive change in pastors' self-reported levels of knowledge and confidence in the area of financial stewardship. On the pre-program survey question regarding pastors' level of confidence about their fundraising ability, fewer than 25% of the pastors who completed the survey expressed any confidence regarding their abilities in this area. On the post-program survey, 100% of the pastors who completed the survey reported that they were either "somewhat confident" or "very confident" regarding their ability in this area.

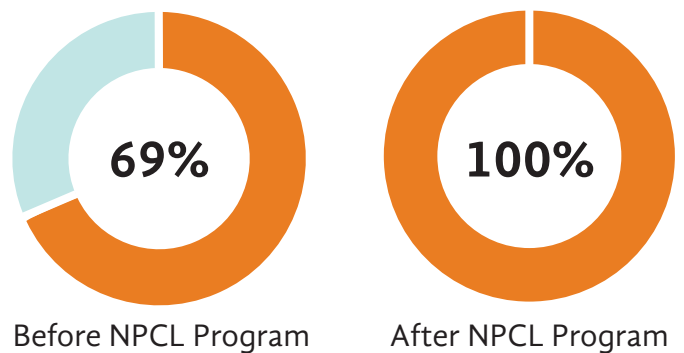
Area Two: Governance and human resource management

Two courses focused on governance and human resource management. In these courses, students were charged with using contemporary management tools to help lead and manage change and resolve conflicts. Students also executed assignments that analyzed the effectiveness of existing governance models in the church and examined and implemented simple changes for improved performance management of staff and volunteers. 80% of students used one or more tools for conflict and/or change management in subsequent team meetings. In one instance, a student reported that she/he was able to make a significant volunteer leadership change that resolved more than two decades of negative organizational challenges. In post-course reviews, students expressed that the experiences of evaluating governance structures and creating a management cycle for volunteers were “incredibly” valuable. As one student noted: “This was a rich class full of information, learning, differing perspectives. It was everything I hoped for and more.”

Ten applied projects focused on strengthening governance and human resource management practices and policies. For example, one project succeeded in decreasing the number of church committees by 40% and decreased time devoted to committee work by 40%, all while increasing committee effectiveness. Another project, designed to help a multi-point charge, developed a policy and procedure manual to guide the governance and process for the first time in the lengthy histories of the churches.

100% of students who completed the post-program survey reported being somewhat (50%) or very (50%) confident regarding their ability to oversee and manage human resources strategies, a significant improvement over pre-program survey responses.

Percent of pastors with self-reported ability to oversee and manage human resource strategies



Area Three: Strategy and organizational effectiveness

The 12-week course designed to increase pastors' skill in strategy design, evaluation, and implementation of organizational improvement practices used tools such as process flow diagrams, strategic planning tools, and efficiency evaluation tools to help students chart pathways for their church, examine effectiveness, and identify areas for improved efficiencies. This course proved to be challenging for pastors who were stretched to engage scientific methods of design and evaluation. Still, pastors reported that examining organizational resource wastes through process mapping and using Gaant charts to help map out goals and measurables were very helpful.

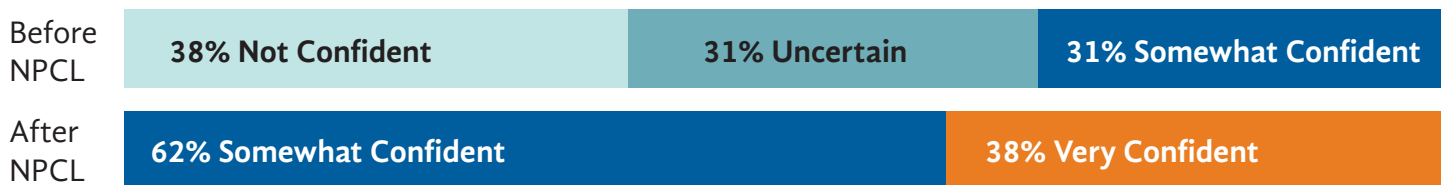


The program also emphasized engaging vision and mission across the programs and processes of the church. Two applied projects targeted the development of revised vision and mission along with comprehensive strategic plans. Two additional projects aimed at eliminating operational inefficiencies and increasing organizational effectiveness. One of these projects developed a completely new task force; the purpose of which will be to guide the church vision and strategy, informing and assisting other mission and governance committees.

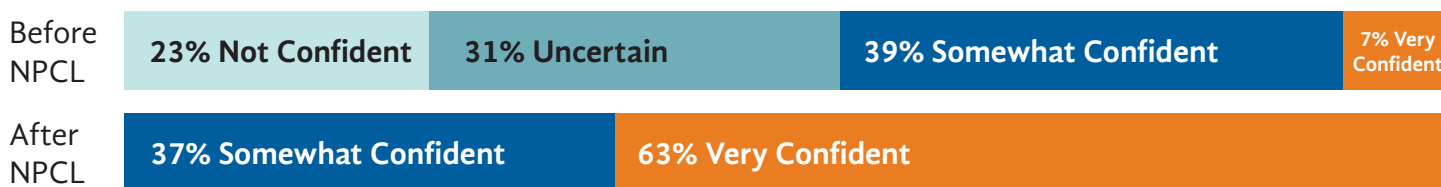
Pre- and post-program surveys from students showed significant gains in knowledge and confidence in the area of strategic planning. In the pre-program survey, a majority of pastors

reported that they were either “not confident” or “uncertain” regarding their ability to lead strategic planning for their church. Whereas, in the post-program survey, 62% of pastors said they were somewhat confident and 38% of pastors reported being very confident. Also, 63% of pastors said they were very confident in their ability to evaluate processes for efficiency and effectiveness. In pre-program survey only 1 (7%) pastor expressed the same degree of confidence and 54% of pastors said they were not or were uncertain of confidence in that area.

Percent of pastors with self-reported confidence in their ability to lead strategic planning for their church



Percent of pastors with self-reported confidence in their ability to evaluate church programs and processes for efficiency and effectiveness



Area Four: Communications and community outreach

Based on student feedback, the program is adding additional course content related to communication strategies and designing effective community outreach. In the pilot group, course assignments that related to these topic areas used comprehensive demographic data to evaluate desirable, practical, and impactful outreach strategies and analyzed the effectiveness of communicating church brand through stories embedded throughout the life of the church. Sample student reflections on assignments include:

“Having read through this data and so much more, there are multiple avenues our church could take. And, while continuing to reach out to the families and families with young children, it appears that we need to continue to reach out to the older people whose numbers will continue to increase.”

– Pastor participant of 2018-2019 inaugural DWU NPCL cohort

“My [community demographic] report shows that over 20% of my neighborhood speaks Spanish at home and over 25% of my neighborhood is less than 13 years old--almost 10,000 children. For this assignment I propose launching a Lean Startup experiment for native Spanish speakers in our neighborhood, wherein we start to test [and evaluate] some of the assumptions we have about that population.”

– Pastor participant of 2018-2019 inaugural DWU NPCL cohort

Another focus for applied projects was to improve branding, marketing and effective mission outreach. One project emphasized inclusion and diversity in redesigned branding for their church while also forming a branding task force. Another project focused on the development of better transparency and reporting mechanisms and still another revamped or, in some instances, created new web and print materials.

100% of pastors reported being very confident in their ability to effectively communicate the vision, mission, and purpose of their church at the completion of the program. Prior to program start, 54% of pastors said they were somewhat confident and another 22% said they were not or unsure.

In what area or areas of administration do you believe you grew the most during the past year?

“Evaluating and creating a plan for strategic change. Being patient and flexible.”
.....

“Creating a culture of generosity.”

“I believe I grew the most in the area of systems and policies.”
.....

“Overall confidence, accelerated decision making, systems thinking.”

“Strategic review of people and church ministries.”
.....

“Strategic planning and using data and measurements to make decisions.”

“Stewardship and finance leadership skills.”
.....

“I grew in knowledge and confidence around leading the financial aspects of the church and visioning.”

Other impact evidence:

Students were asked “from your perspective, in what area or areas of administration do you believe you grew the most during the past year.” Responses are highlighted below.

Pastors were asked to describe pressing challenges facing their church in the coming decade. Among responses, pastors noted that decreases in population and membership would be an issue in rural communities, financial sustainability and need for more adaptive space, aging populations, and fewer commitments to traditional church programming along with remaining relevant to diverse populations. Additionally, pastors were asked whether or not they felt more or less confident to meet these challenges as a result of participation in the program. Responses are listed below. 100% of pastors noted improved confidence.

Do you feel confident in meeting the challenges your church faces after this program?

“I feel a confidence that focuses on the administrative side of things, especially in reference to finances... I also have the confidence to lead in the midst of challenge that our wider church is thrusting into the local church.”

“I am more confident in being able to address issues related to stewardship and generosity.”
.....

“Financial opportunities, charting a path of projects that move us forward.”

“I feel more confident in strategic planning and project management.”
.....

“Leading stewardship discussions and initiatives and governance structures revisions.”

“I feel more confident. I know that a capital campaign is in our future and feel more ready to take that challenge on.”

Church leaders expressed greater confidence in their pastor's ability to lead their church, when comparing pre- and post-program survey data. Over 79% of respondents agreed that they were more confident in their pastor post-program involvement.

We asked members of church leadership teams to describe what the greatest advantage of program participation was for their pastor. Select quotes include:

“I believe that the information (she) gained during the last year was very beneficial in leading our financial team into today's world.”

“Future planning discussions and restructuring focus to simplify and reduce the time required for volunteers in the “business” aspects of the church.”

“I feel she is more organized and has been doing better at guiding the church leadership rather than directing the church leadership.”

“(He) has tried out new things and we've dealt with some issues that we may not have tackled before.”

“Growth can only happen when you are challenged and exposed to new ideas that are used elsewhere. I think this program has opened his eyes and given him new perspectives. Super valuable.”

Summary of impact

Results from comprehensive assessment demonstrate that the pilot program strengthened both the knowledge and confidence levels among participating pastors. Participants cited great gains in understanding and application of financial development practices, leading and managing high-performing teams, developing and executing strategic plans, and governance. It was clear, based on repeated focus-group and survey feedback, that these professionals benefited greatly through the development of a network of peers to advance their administrative competencies. Unsurprising was the perceived benefit of coaches among participants. The majority of participants, when questioned, noted that the coaching relationship was of extreme value in helping with accountability, project development, project adaptation, and other skill development needed for project execution. Churches, represented by post-program survey responses, highlighted noticed improvements in communications, improved processes and procedures, and marked increases in enthusiasm among members as a result of program involvement.

Finally, evidence of the program impact is ongoing. Stories of impact continue to be reported by graduates, lay leaders, and Conference and Foundation leaders months after program completion.



Guest speaker Scott McKenzie presents at the July 2019 gathering of the NPCL program.

“A program graduate recently invited me to attend his investment committee meeting, hoping to encourage his lay leadership to consider investing with the Foundation. During the meeting, I was amazed at how well he articulated principles and best practices for strategic giving, including planned gifts, estate gifts and more. The pastor exhibited confidence in the subject and clearly knew how to steward the conversation. This new found confidence in our pastors makes them a true partner with the stewardship, investment and generosity conversation at the table. It’s encouraging to know that we’re in this together.”

– Sheri Meister, Dakotas and Minnesota Foundation President/CEO

Former students and graduates have also shared accolades following the program:

“This [program] is exactly what I needed at this point in my life and has restored a confidence in me that was greatly tested over several years of ministry. I am very grateful not only for the coursework and coaching, but also the collegial support we developed across conferences this last year that continues.”

“[During the program] I was able to begin the culture change of this congregation to not just focus on the “fall drive” but to think about stewardship of resources, time, and talent throughout the year. As of today, our yearly income has outpaced expenses and we haven’t touched the [funds] that we put into savings last year, so numbers are good.”

“My own goals this year include a continuation of the 2nd applied project, a piece of which is increasing the number of and satisfaction of volunteers. I intend to create some type of plan to further this goal. I also volunteered to assist congregations in our district with financial “situations” and intend to use the tool (created for my first applied project) as part of that work.”

“We are sitting on more than \$20,000 in reserves for the first time in church history. I am also thrilled to report that I made a significant ask from a major church donor for the first time ever... and he wrote me a check on the spot.”



“What I believe has been established in the program is a trifecta of adult learning success: quality curriculum content, applied projects for application in the church, and coaching to support growth and development. The coaching piece is, in many ways, the secret sauce. Most educational experiences provide content and curriculum. Most also can look to application in various ways, at least encouraging. But, in the case of NPCL, the students are not alone. With the coach, they have a safety net – a place to discuss application, a place to be mindful of the realities they face day-to-day as church leaders, a place to consider the possibilities ... personally and professionally ... in their development. Coaching can appear as, providing the answers when they don't know what they don't know.”

– Bill Lewis, coaching coordinator, NPCL





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