



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Wartburg Theological Seminary Awards Inaugural CaSTLE Project Grants to Support Small Town and Rural Congregations

Dubuque, IA – Wartburg Theological Seminary is pleased to announce the first cohort of grant recipients for The CaSTLE Project: Country and Small Town Lived Ecclesiology, a five-year initiative designed to renew and strengthen life in small town and rural communities through a focus on baptismal identity and ministry.

Following a competitive application process, 18 synods across the United States have been selected to receive subgrants through The CaSTLE Project. These grants will support innovative approaches to ministry that embody a Spirit-led, baptismally grounded ecclesiology — building capacity for long-term vitality in congregations often located in under-resourced or overlooked contexts.

“We are thrilled to support and accompany this remarkable group of leaders and communities,” said Rev. Ramie Bakken, Director for The CaSTLE Project. “This first cohort represents a hopeful and Spirit-filled response to the unique challenges and opportunities facing small-town and rural churches today.”

“It is a happy coincidence,” continued Bakken, “that we are announcing our first set of grants as we begin the season of Pentecost. Like the Pentecost story in Acts 2, The CaSTLE Project is about the Holy Spirit’s power stirring the hearts and minds of all people to both speak and hear the good news of Jesus Christ—now, in this time, in the language of small-town and rural contexts, in everyday encounters.”

2025 Grant Recipients

Grants for Training and Coaching of Mentor Pastors and Lay Leaders:

- Eastern North Dakota Synod
- South Dakota Synod
- Southwestern Minnesota Synod
- Northwest Synod of Wisconsin
- Indiana-Kentucky Synod
- Northwestern Ohio Synod
- Upper Susquehanna Synod

- Virginia Synod
- Southeastern Iowa Synod
- Western Iowa Synod
- Northeastern Iowa Synod
- South-Central Synod of Wisconsin

Grants for Ecumenical Experiments:

- Northwest Intermountain Synod
- Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod

2025–2029 Grants for Transformation:

- Northwestern Minnesota Synod
- Nebraska Synod
- Central/Southern Illinois Synod
- Northeastern Ohio Synod

The grant recipients will join a learning community that includes ongoing coaching, collaborative research, and participation in an annual conference, the first of which will be held August 11–13, 2025, at Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa.

The CaSTLE Project is funded by a generous grant from the Lilly Endowment Inc. as part of its Thriving Congregations Initiative.

The next round of subgrant applications will open in October 2025.

For more information about The CaSTLE Project, visit: <https://www.wartburgseminary.edu/castle-project>

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