

# **STRENGTH FOR THE JOURNEY**

## **Program Description**

*Two are better than one,  
because they have a good reward for their toil.  
For if they fall, one will lift up the other...  
A threefold cord is not quickly broken.*

Ecclesiastes 4: 9-10a, 12b NRSV



## **Program Description**

**To those who minister:  
This is a gift from your church.  
We see you, hear you, and value you.  
We pray this program will support  
and encourage you in your sacred work.**

Strength for the Journey (SFTJ) brings together small groups of ministers via Zoom to share experiences, hone skills, explore ideas, wrestle with common dilemmas, and take on topics that spark new energy for ministry, all while earning CEUs.

Ministry is a sacred and meaningful calling. As ministers, we bear witness to the Divine, create spaces for worship and prayer, tend to the needs of others, and encourage God's people toward lives of faithfulness in the ways of Jesus. All of this is rewarding but cannot be accomplished alone. Ministers need other ministers for support, encouragement, and accountability, to help each other find strength for the journey.

Strength for the Journey offers resources for up to five ministry cohorts each year. Cohorts of 5-8 ministers meet via Zoom for ten to twelve, ninety-minute sessions during that year. Each group is assisted by a skilled convener, a designated Zoom account, and a budget for resources. Additional funds are available to help groups gather in person at the end of their year, if they so choose. All of this is available to participants at no personal cost.

Every cohort will incorporate time for worship and prayer, as well as continuing education. Continuing Education Units (CEUs) will be awarded for the latter. Participants may earn up to 1.2 CEUs for full participation.

Applications will be accepted September 1 through October 31. Applications will be reviewed in early November with cohort to be formed for the new year. Up to 5 total cohorts will be approved each year.

## Who Can Participate In Strength for the Journey?

Strength for the Journey is open to all Church of the Brethren ministers, regardless of the setting of their service. The Church of the Brethren recognizes the following areas of ministry:

- Pastor of a congregation.
- Person serving a congregation in self-supporting ministry.
- Administrator or teacher in a theological seminary.
- Teacher of religion in a school, college, or university.
- Staff persons with districts, the denomination, and other Annual Conference agencies.
- Missionary assigned to pastoral or evangelistic duties.
- Chaplain (e.g., chaplaincy in a hospital, hospice, long-term care facility, campus, prison, or industrial setting).
- Person serving in a specialized ministry under the auspices of a congregation or other institutional entity (e.g., youth ministry, Christian education, camp administrator, ecumenical ministries, spiritual direction, pastoral counselor, church planter).
- Ministers retired from their area of service.

Church of the Brethren Ministerial Leadership, 2014, p.17

## What Are The Expectations of Cohort Participants?

Persons interested in participating in Strength for the Journey are expected to

- 1) Be serving in one of the ministry areas recognized by the Church of the Brethren
- 2) Demonstrate the ability to learn and grow
- 3) Demonstrate a willingness to be in a relationship with a cohort group
- 4) Commit to making participation in their cohort a priority
- 5) Commit to drawing on their own creativity, imagination, and gifts
- 6) Commit to honoring the creativity, imagination, and gifts of others
- 7) Fulfill administrative expectations

- 8) Be prepared for a shared-learning experience that:
- values diversity and honors difference while pursuing common goals and objectives
  - provides a safe place for intentional dialogue and learning
  - promotes spiritual, physical, emotional, relational, and intellectual health

## What Do Cohorts Do?

Each cohort is comprised of 5-8 ministers and may be one of three types:

### Deep Dive Cohort –

Participants in a Deep Dive Cohort will engage in a conversation about a topic of mutual interest. A Deep Dive cohort may explore a book, an area of ministry, a social concern, or develop skills for worship, preaching, or peacebuilding. The possibilities for topics and focus are nearly endless!

### Specialized Ministry Cohort

The Church of the Brethren recognizes a variety of ministries: pastors, chaplains, spiritual directors, pastoral counselors, outdoor ministers, religious educators, etc. Specialized Ministry Cohorts allow those who share a calling to gather for mutual support as well as personal and professional growth.

### Case Study Cohort

After a time of community building and preparation, participants will draw on the collective wisdom of their cohort as they bring case studies for discussion from their own ministry settings.

## What Resources Do Cohorts Have?

- A convener is matched with each cohort. The role of the convener is to
  - create and hold safe and sacred space for the cohort members
  - support the cohort as it defines and pursues its purpose
  - assist the cohort in identifying and securing resources
  - record attendance for participants seeking CEUs

- Each convener will have a designated Zoom account to use for cohort meetings.
- Each cohort will have a budget of \$1,000 for resources – books, guest presenters, etc.
- Each cohort will have a budget of \$1,500 to help with the cost of an in-person gathering if they so choose.

### How Do I Choose A Cohort?

During the application process, applicants will rank the three types of cohorts in order of preference. They will also name their ministry specialty, such as pastor, chaplain, religious educator, etc. They may even suggest areas of interest they bring to SFTJ, such as health and wellbeing, patterns of worship, conflict transformation, trauma informed care, or ways to be “Jesus in the Neighborhood”. Applicants may list a variety of interests. All of this information will assist the Brethren Academy in forming cohorts. While there is no guarantee of a perfect match of interests, each cohort will be an opportunity for sharing, prayer, learning, and building relationships that offer strength for the journey of faith and ministry.

Groups of ministers are welcome to apply for SFTJ as well as individuals. Groups may apply together on one form and identify areas of shared interest. SFTJ allows for new topics or deeper exploration of topics addressed in other settings, such as pre-conference or district events or Annual Conference equipping sessions. If an idea is sparked and a group needs a place and resources to explore it, SFTJ may be able to help.

Case Study Cohorts offer special opportunities for collaboration and learning around actual ministry situations. After a time of learning to write and share case studies effectively, participants will bring cases for discussion in a safe and confidential environment. The goal of the Case Studies Cohort is not to solve problems but to think prayerfully, creatively, theologically, and together.

## **How are Zoom Gatherings Scheduled?**

Once a cohort has been established and matched with a convener, that convener will reach out to members of the cohort to schedule a first gathering. The scheduling of subsequent gatherings will be discussed with the cohort. The convener is the keeper of the designated Zoom account and will initiate all Zoom gatherings.

The 10 to 12 gatherings will span no more than one year (twelve months). Typically, cohorts will meet once a month. However, certain circumstances may make meeting during a shorter time span beneficial. It is advised that no more than 90 minutes be spent on Zoom at one time; however, that may be adjusted to accommodate a speaker, a film, or another experience. All adjustments to timing must be made with the full agreement of all the cohort members and the convener.

## **What Happens at that First Gathering?**

Every cohort gathering will begin with a time of checking in and connecting as well as time for centering devotions and prayer. This will initially be led by the convener, then shared among the cohort members at subsequent gatherings.

The majority of each 90-minute session will be spent in continuing education. During the first gathering, Deep Dive and Specialized Ministry Cohorts will discuss their areas of interest for study and identify resources they wish to explore- books, films, podcasts, presenters, etc. Each convener will also have a list of resources that they can suggest. Case Study Cohorts will spend their initial sessions in group building and learning to use the Case Study process .

Some cohorts will come together with a clear focus and interest in specific resources. Others will only begin to identify their focus in their first one or two sessions. Every cohort will be different.

Once a resource or resources are identified, the convener will work with the Brethren Academy to determine availability.

## How Do Cohorts Access Funds for Resources and Retreats?

### Resources

Each cohort will have a budget of \$1,000 for resources – books, materials, honorariums for presenters, etc.

Books or other tangible resources will be ordered through the Brethren Academy. The cohort's convener will notify the Brethren Academy to make arrangements.

Funding for resource people will be paid directly to the presenter. The convener will contact the Brethren Academy to make arrangements. All resource people will need to provide a W9 before payment can be processed: <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/fw9.pdf>

Any expenditures made by the convener or members of the cohort must be preapproved by the Brethren Academy and will be paid upon the submission of receipts.

### Retreats

Each cohort will have the opportunity to gather in-person at the end of their time on Zoom. If a cohort chooses this option, there are funds to help support it. Each cohort will have a budget of \$1,500 to use toward this purpose. Any funding required beyond the \$1,500 will be the responsibility of the cohort members.

Cohort members will plan and conduct their own in-person gathering. In order to access funding, the cohort members will create an expense plan and submit it to the Brethren Academy prior to the retreat. If the expense plan is approved, the Brethren Academy will reimburse up to \$1,500 upon approval of receipts.

In-person gatherings should take place within the 12 months following the cohort's last Zoom meeting.

## How are Continuing Education Units (CEUs) Awarded?

CEUs are awarded for Strength for the Journey based on two things:

- Regular participation in Zoom gatherings
- The completion of a final reflection paper at the end of the program

Participation in an in-person retreat is not required for CEUs.

Final reflection papers are due three months from the last cohort Zoom gathering. Prompts for the paper will be sent to each cohort member as well as posted online.

Once a participant's attendance and final reflections are reviewed and approved by the Brethren Academy, a digital CEU certificate will be emailed to the participant free of charge.

## How and When Do I Apply

An application can be found at the end of this program description as well as at <https://bethanyseminary.edu/brethren-academy/> See "Continuing Education."

Anyone who wishes to receive a paper copy of the application may contact the Brethren Academy at 765-983-1824 or 1-800287-8822 ext. 1824 or [academy@bethanyseminary.edu](mailto:academy@bethanyseminary.edu)

Send completed applications to:

Strength for the Journey  
Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership  
615 National Road West, Richmond, IN 47374  
[academy@bethanyseminary.edu](mailto:academy@bethanyseminary.edu)

Applications will be accepted through October 31. Applications will be reviewed in early November with cohort to be formed for the new year. Up to 5 total cohorts will be approved each year.

Any individual or group unable to be accommodated in the current calendar year will be placed on a waiting list for a future cohort.



## Do You Still Have Questions?

Please contact the Brethren Academy at:

[academy@bethanyseminary.edu](mailto:academy@bethanyseminary.edu)

or

765-983-1824

or

1-800-287-8822 ext. 1824

## Who Makes This Program Possible?

Strength for the Journey is a program of the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership, a partnership of Bethany Theological Seminary and the Church of the Brethren. Funding for registration and resources, as well as some assistance with travel, is provided through the David J. and Mary Elizabeth Wieand Trust.