

pathways for tomorrow



A Collaborative Vision for **Ministry Preparation**
and **Sustainable Theological Education**



*Collaborate.
Form.
Sustain.*





Mission: To bring together Free Methodist churches, conferences, and schools to create a practical, connected, and holistic path for pastoral formation.

Vision: A strong and collaborative Free Methodist network that equips pastors through accessible theological education and holistic pastoral formation.





BT Roberts



Seminary students



Spring Arbor School 1909

The **Free Methodist** Heritage

From the beginning, the Free Methodist movement has been committed to accessible ministry, Spirit-fueled leadership, holiness, justice, discipleship, and transformational community impact.

Founded by B.T. Roberts, the movement sought to create a Church where:

- the gospel was available to all
- spiritual vitality mattered deeply
- ordinary people were empowered for ministry
- leaders were formed in both holiness and mission

The Free Methodist Theological Connection continues that historic commitment by creating collaborative, accessible, spiritually grounded pathways for the next generation of leaders.



The Church is experiencing one of the most important leadership moments in recent history.

Recent national ministry studies reveal:

- Many pastors report frequent burnout and emotional exhaustion
- Clergy loneliness and isolation continue to rise
- Younger ministry leaders seek more relational and practical formation
- Many churches struggle to identify future pastoral leaders
- The cost of theological education remains a major barrier for emerging leaders

The implications are that healthy pastors build healthy churches and healthy churches transform communities.

The future vitality of the Church depends greatly upon the leaders we form today. The Free Methodist Church has always believed leadership matters deeply because transformed leaders help build transformed communities.

There is an urgent need for ongoing, practical, accessible and affordable ministry training that supports pastoral leaders across the Free Methodist Church.

Many emerging leaders seek **real-world skills**, **deeper spiritual growth**, and **relational support**, while partner schools face **growing challenges** in sustaining their programs. The need for **accessible** and **sustainable theological education** through our AFMEI schools is vital to fulfilling these needs.

With support from Lilly Endowment Inc. through its Pathways for Tomorrow initiative, the Theological Connection partnership can **build a shared system** that offers **accessible training**, **multilingual resources**, and **steady, high-quality formation** for current and future leaders.







Recent research paints a stark picture of U.S. clergy: pastors are stressed, overworked, and lonely, leading to doubts and burnout.

Those who enter ministry with a sense of calling—to lead congregations and bring God’s love to neighborhoods and cities—are finding their pastoral careers and ministry impact diminished. Many feel ill-equipped, lack encouragement, and have few opportunities for supportive Christian fellowship. When spiritually vital and theologically deep education and resources, are readily accessible to equip and sustain pastors, both pastors and churches thrive.

A Pastor's Story

Michael felt called into ministry while serving faithfully in his local Free Methodist church. He loved people deeply and sensed God inviting him into pastoral leadership. But the pathway forward felt overwhelming.

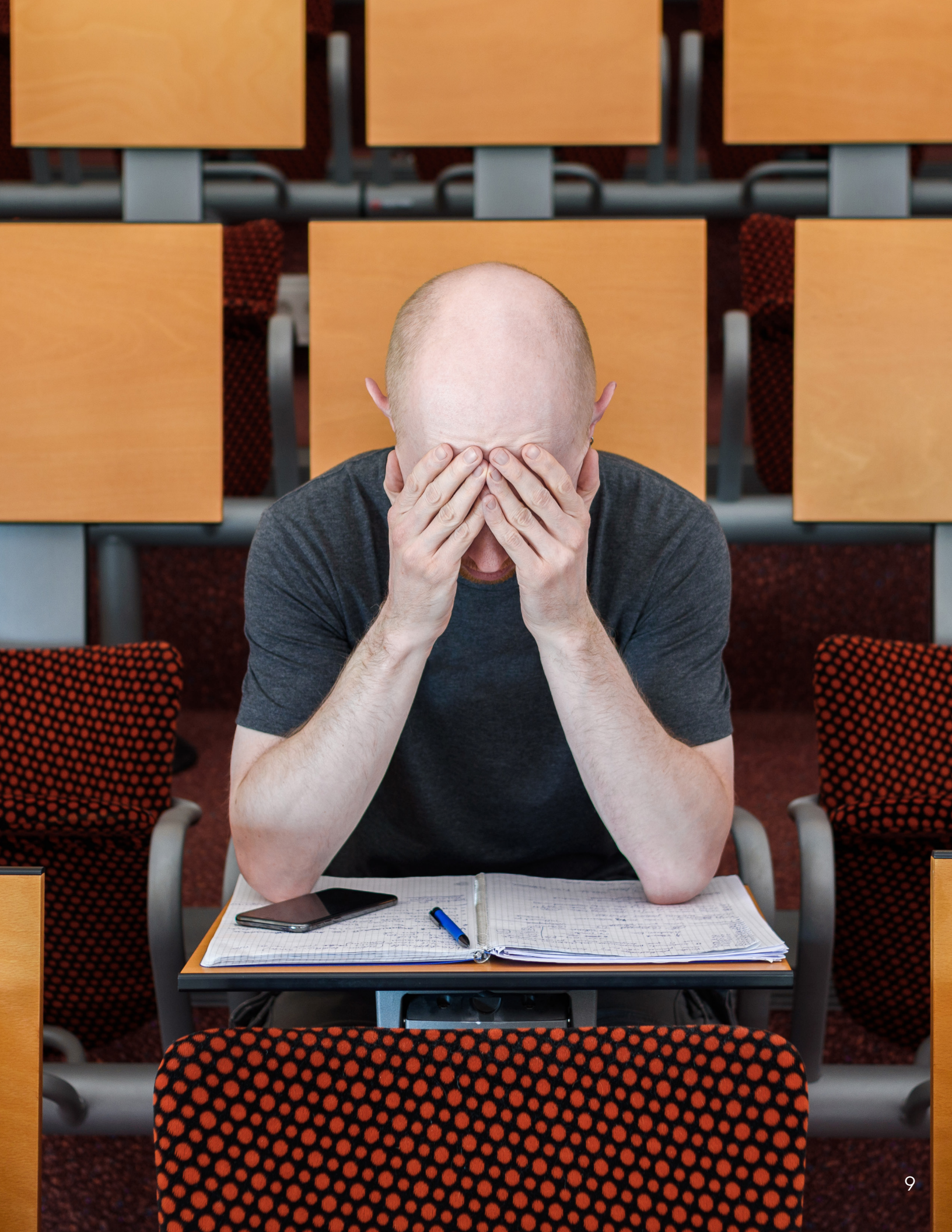
He worked full-time to support his family. Seminary costs felt impossible. He lacked access to mentoring. Most educational pathways felt disconnected from the realities of ministry in his local community.

As ministry pressures increased, Michael began wondering whether he could sustain his calling long-term.

Through the Free Methodist Theological Connection, leaders like Michael will gain:

- Accessible educational pathways
- Spiritual mentoring
- Practical ministry preparation
- Relational support
- Long-term sustainability

Future pastors **should not have to choose between their calling and sustainability.**







Because leadership is essential to the long-term impact of any spiritual movement, we invest deeply in the development of both lay and pastoral leaders with the expectation that we will have both the quality and quantity of leaders to meet the needs of a growing movement.

Collaborate.

The Free Methodist Theological Connection brings together conferences, institutions, churches, mentors, and ministry leaders into a unified ecosystem of pastoral development.

This collaborative model allows:

- Shared educational resources
- Aligned ministry pathways
- Expanded accessibility
- Institutional partnership
- Movement-wide ownership

Form.

The Connection exists to form spiritually healthy, deeply rooted pastoral leaders.

This model develops leaders who are:

- Spiritually formed
- Mentored and disciplined
- Relationally encouraged
- Practically prepared for ministry
- Emotionally resilient

The Connection exists to form spiritually healthy, deeply rooted, mission-driven leaders.

Sustain.

The Connection's goal is to increase pastoral longevity and church vitality through sustainable ministry ecosystems.

The Connection seeks to:

- Reducing barriers to education
- Strengthening ministry health
- Creating mentoring support systems
- Expanding accessibility
- Providing long-term infrastructure
- Sustaining leadership development for generations

Together, **these three commitments create pathways for tomorrow.**

Proposed Solution and Approach

The Free Methodist Theological Connection (FMTC) is a consortium of Free Methodist conferences and institutions whose main objective will be to expand collaborators' capacity to offer ministry-focused education and pastoral formation for preparing pastoral leaders and position them for a more sustainable future of Church leadership.

Pillar One Renovating Educational Pathways

- Renovate educational pathways to make multilingual, cultural relevant, ministry preparation accessible for every leader called by God.

Pillar Two Expanding Online Education

- Expand online and collaborative education by establishing a consortium of Association of Free Methodist Educational Institutions schools to align academic programs.
- Connecting leaders across geography, culture, and language through innovative formation.

Pillar Three Deepening Formational Experiences

- Deepening formational experiences by, establishing a mentoring and coaching program and providing spiritual formation resources.
- Strengthening and establishing mentoring and coaching programs to develop spiritually healthy, relationally supported pastors for long term ministry.

Each Pillar supports the larger mission to
Collaborate, Form, and Sustain.



The Endowment Opportunity

The Free Methodist Theological Connection is designed for long-term sustainability.

To sustain the work on the Connection an endowment goal of **\$3,000,000** has been set. The endowment will:

- Sustain operational leadership
- Support accessibility
- Strengthen ministry formation
- Reduce barriers to theological education
- Support future generations of leaders

Thanks to an endowment matching grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. the first **\$500,000** will be matched three to one.

This means every dollar invested today creates multiplied Kingdom impact.

This endowment represents:

- Sustainable leadership development
- Future church vitality
- Movement-wide collaboration
- Long-term pastoral support
- Transformational Kingdom investment

Together, we can collaborate, form, and sustain the future of the Church.



Financial Goals & Future Impact

The immediate campaign objective is to secure \$500,000 in leadership gifts over the next 12 months. This focused strategy is designed around major donor cultivation and transformational leadership investment. Through the Lilly Endowment matching opportunity, these leadership gifts will help create sustainable future support for educational access, pastoral mentoring, leadership accessibility, spiritual formation, and future ministry development.



Our Leadership

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Partner Institutions



Genesis Conference
of the Free Methodist Church



**The Network of
Undeniable Blessing Conference**
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North Central Conference
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