



## **Church Cohort Information Packet**

Is your church looking to become an even more welcoming and accessible place for people of all ages, located in western Maine or eastern New Hampshire, and prepared to take on a new, congregation-wide project? We have just the opportunity for you!

Your church is invited to apply to a new cohort program starting this fall, run by First Church in Bridgton, Maine, designed to bring churches together in small, collaborative groups to spend one year in an intentional community of practice exploring innovative children's and intergenerational ministry. If selected for the cohort program, churches will form a team of staff and church members committed to children's and intergenerational ministry that will attend regular events, lead the development of new intergenerational ministry projects in their congregation, carry out evaluations of those projects, and integrate what's learned from evaluations into the life of the church.

All of this will happen with the support of the Hub— churches selected for the cohort program will receive at least \$8,000 in micro-grant funding over the course of their cohort year, extensive consultation time with our dedicated staff, funds for professional clergy coaching, access to a library of digital and physical resources, and the learning experiences of collaborating with other cohort churches. This is the first year of the cohort program, which will run four times from 2025 to 2029.

This packet is designed to introduce the Western Maine Children's Ministry Hub and our new church cohort program, to provide an overview of the cohort experience and application, and to let churches and other organizations know that partnering with the Hub extends beyond our cohort program. Keep reading for more information about the timeline of the cohort program, the application process, participation requirements, and the benefits of joining a cohort.

# Western Maine Children's Ministry Hub

## About the Hub

Based at [First Church in Bridgton, Maine](#), the Western Maine Children's Ministry Hub, also known as the Hub, is a new center connecting churches doing innovative, inclusive children's and intergenerational ministry in western Maine and beyond. The Hub was established in November 2024 with support from [Lilly Endowment, Inc.'s Nurturing Children Through Worship and Prayer grant initiative](#) and First Church. Led by an advisory board of First Church lay and pastoral leadership, the Hub is directed by [Spencer Law](#), First Church's Minister for Intergenerational Innovation.

First Church has spent the first year of our five-year grant period exploring and experimenting with intergenerational worship and prayer in our congregation, evaluating and learning from our experimentation, and building even deeper relationships among people of all ages in our church. Now, the focus of our grant program turns outward as we invite our neighbors in faith to join the Hub through our church cohort program, which will run for the remaining four years of our grant period.



The liturgical library corner of our sanctuary, designed for children and families, including prayer bears, children's Bibles, coloring books, and a rocking chair



The opening moments of our first Wise Ones Luncheon, where adults with extensive church experience discussed intergenerational worship over lunch



## The Cohort Program

In fall 2025, the Hub will welcome our first cohort of churches interested in developing their own innovative practices and spaces for children's and intergenerational ministry. Cohorts will consist of four to six churches of any denomination that seek to become more welcoming, inclusive, accessible, and nurturing places for people of all ages and backgrounds, and that are prepared to undertake a congregation-wide initiative working toward that vision with the support of the Hub and our staff. Each church in a cohort will form a team of people who work closely with or have interest in children's and intergenerational ministry in their congregation to represent the church at Hub events and guide the church through the cohort program with the support of the Hub.

Each team from a cohort church will spend time early in the cohort year with Hub staff and consultants assessing their church's physical space, resources, congregation, budget, and personnel to develop a road map designed to bring their church toward that vision. During this assessment process, the team will work with Hub staff to discern their congregation's best uses for micro-grant funding, whether that means putting new furniture in Sunday School classrooms, removing a pew in the sanctuary for accessibility, buying new Sunday School curriculum and materials, or something else entirely. Hub staff will work with each team to write a brief, but detailed proposal for micro-grant funding based on the needs they have collectively identified.

Once proposals have been reviewed and accepted by the Hub, each church will receive an initial, smaller micro-grant of at least \$3,000 to facilitate the implementation of their plans early in the cohort year. During the cohort year, churches will work with Hub staff to evaluate the implementation of the initial micro-grant according to each church's own metrics of success and discern best uses for a second, larger micro-grant of at least \$5,000. In the spring of each cohort year, cohort church teams will work with Hub staff to write a second micro-grant proposal, and a second round of funds will be disbursed according to the needs of each cohort church to carry out a more robust, fully-fledged intergenerational ministry project.

Actual funding amounts will vary based on the size and needs of each cohort, but we can guarantee a minimum of \$8,000 in funding for each cohort church to support their children's and intergenerational ministry initiatives, and we anticipate that we will ultimately have at least \$10,000 for each cohort church. The discernment and proposal process for micro-grant



# Western Maine Children's Ministry Hub

funding will formally begin at Cohort Orientation on September 13, and cohort churches are encouraged to think creatively about ways they might work together to combine projects and funds for an even greater impact.

We know that introducing and implementing innovative, experimental ministry ideas at your church will be both rewarding and challenging. To account for this, we have set aside funds for staff at cohort churches to work with professional clergy coaches during their cohort year, and we are committed to building deep, collaborative relationships among cohort churches for mutual sustainability. The cohort program is designed not as a one-way vehicle of instruction and implementation, but as a reciprocal, collaborative community of practice where ideas, resources, and inspiration are shared widely for the good of all.

This year marks the beginning of our cohort program, which will continue for the next four years. From 2025 to 2029, we will accept applications for a new cohort of churches each May, welcome cohorts at a Cohort Orientation hosted by First Church each September, offer collaborative workshops and consultations in partnership with cohort churches through the spring, and host a celebratory Summit for all Hub churches at Pilgrim Lodge, the Maine UCC summer camp, in June of each year, starting in 2026. You can learn more about the event participation expectations for cohort churches in the “Timeline” section below.

If your church might be interested in the cohort program, but isn't ready to apply this year for any reason, don't worry! Your church will have three more opportunities to apply to our cohort program in the coming years. After this year's inaugural Hope Cohort runs from 2025-2026, we'll welcome the Peace Cohort from 2026-2027, the Joy Cohort from 2027-2028, and finally the Love Cohort from 2028-2029. We are open to the possibility of expanding our cohort program or dividing larger cohorts into smaller working groups in future years should the need arise, though our priority will remain maximizing funds available to each of our cohort churches.

Applications for our first cohort program will open on May 2, 2025 and close on June 13, 2025. First Church staff and lay leadership will review applications in June and July, and churches will be notified whether or not they have been selected for a cohort on August 1, 2025. More details can be found in the “Applications” section below.

## Cohort expectations

Churches applying to be part of a cohort should consider who will attend Hub events if selected for a cohort. Each church selected for the cohort program will be asked to establish a team of three to four people from their congregation to represent their church at the Cohort Orientation on September 13, monthly workshops, and the weekend-long Summit in June 2026. Ideally, each team will consist of both lay and clergy members, including someone who serves in a pastoral role, like a senior pastor or associate minister, as well as someone connected to Christian education, Sunday School, or any children's or youth ministry, if there is such a person in your church. The other members of your team can be anyone of any age who is interested and able to participate in the cohort program.

We understand that many churches (particularly the smaller, more rural churches we especially hope to support) have limited staff and volunteer support, and that staff and volunteers have limited time, so there is no firm requirement that people in certain roles must be on a church's team. Your team can take shape in many ways: one church might have their associate pastor, a Sunday School teacher, and an involved parent, and a deacon on their team, while another might have their senior pastor, a retired schoolteacher, and a teenager on their team. While the makeup of your team will look different based on the context and the needs of your church, please be sure that those who would be part of your team understand the following expectations:

- Cohort church team members are expected to attend eight events during the cohort year (see the "Timeline" section below for more details)
  - **Cohort Orientation** at First Church in Bridgton on Saturday, September 13, 2025 (one time, 5-6 hours long with lunch and childcare provided) featuring a keynote speaker and cohort community building
  - **Six workshops** (roughly two hours long each) held at cohort churches on Saturday mornings or afternoons between October 2025 and April 2026 on topics like creative worship experiences for all ages
  - **Summit** at Pilgrim Lodge one weekend in June 2026 (one time, likely a Thursday afternoon to Saturday afternoon, exact dates TBA at Cohort Orientation, with meals, lodging, and childcare provided) featuring a keynote speaker, camp activities, and intergenerational worship services
- Individuals ages 18 and up who attend the Summit or any overnight event sponsored by the Hub will be required to pass a background check

# Western Maine Children's Ministry Hub

- Individuals of any age who attend the Summit or any overnight event will be required to submit emergency contact and health forms

All events are free for cohort churches to attend during their cohort year, and children's programming, childcare, and meals will be provided at the Cohort Orientation and Summit. Lodging will be provided at the Summit as well. Cohort churches will be invited to attend Hub events in the years following their cohort year, though they will not receive the same individualized consultation or additional micro-grant funding after their cohort year ends.

Churches selected for a cohort will be asked to host one or two workshops during the cohort year. This only means that your church will be asked to open your building to other cohort churches and other interested attendees for a few hours on one or two Saturdays during the cohort year. The Hub will manage all programming and other logistical details, and we will run the workshop itself.

## Applications

The application for churches interested in joining our first cohort will be posted on the First Church website and directly distributed to churches that have indicated their interest in the program on May 2, 2025. To indicate your interest in the program and receive the application directly, please email Spencer Law at [spencer@bridgtonucc.org](mailto:spencer@bridgtonucc.org). Churches that wrote letters in support of the grant award will receive priority consideration in the application process, but are not necessarily guaranteed a spot in our first cohort. Churches of any size and denomination are welcome to apply, **regardless of whether you have any active children and teenagers in your congregation**. Churches that need assistance navigating the application process are encouraged to reach out. We are happy to walk you through the application and even fill it out with you remotely or in person!

The application will ask churches to describe the status of existing children's and intergenerational ministries, challenges the church faces related to all-ages ministry, the church's vision for innovation and development of those ministries, and how the cohort program might benefit the church's work toward that vision. Churches will be encouraged to describe how they are already working to become more welcoming, inclusive, accessible, and nurturing places for people of all ages and backgrounds, and the ways in which they are prepared to undertake a congregation-wide initiative working toward innovative intergenerational ministry with the support of the Hub.



While we will not be able to select every church that applies for our first cohort, some churches will be encouraged to spend more time in preparation and apply for another cohort in the years to come. Every church that wants to be involved with the Hub will have that opportunity whether or not they apply or are selected for a cohort– see the “Beyond cohorts” section for more.

## Cohort timeline

Teams from cohort churches are expected to attend eight events during the cohort year: an opening Cohort Orientation held at First Church in Bridgton on September 13, a series of six monthly workshops hosted by cohort churches, and a final, celebratory overnight Summit held at Pilgrim Lodge in West Gardiner in June 2026. These events are marked in **bold** in the timeline below.

We don't expect that all team members will be able to attend every event, but it is expected that at least one team member will be present at each event. Should all team members be unavailable for a particular event, it is expected that churches will arrange for one or more substitute representatives to attend. When deciding who will be on your team if your church is selected for a cohort, please be sure that those interested in participating are available all day on September 13, 2025, and that they are available and open to attending an overnight Summit at Pilgrim Lodge in June 2026 (exact dates TBA at Cohort Orientation).

March 21, 2025: Cohort information packet made available

May 2, 2025: Hope Cohort application open

June 13, 2025: Hope Cohort application deadline

July 2025: Hope Cohort applications reviewed

August 1, 2025: Hope Cohort churches notified

September 13, 2025: **Hope Cohort Orientation at First Church**, churches begin planning first micro-grant proposal

October 2025: **Workshop at cohort church**, first micro-grant proposals due and reviewed

November 2025: **Workshop at cohort church**, first micro-grants distributed

# Western Maine Children's Ministry Hub

December 2025: no workshop– Advent and Christmas are busy enough!

January 2026: **Workshop at cohort church**

February 2026: **Workshop at cohort church**, churches administer initial evaluation for first micro-grant

March 2026: **Workshop at cohort church**, initial evaluations for first micro-grant due, churches begin second micro-grant proposal

April 2026: **Workshop at cohort church**, second micro-grant proposals due and reviewed

May 2026: Peace Cohort application open, second micro-grants distributed, first micro-grant full evaluations due

June 2026: **Hope Summit at Pilgrim Lodge**, Peace Cohort application deadline

## Hub website

The Hub website, to be launched in late spring 2025, will gradually be developed to house a library of digital resources including Sunday School curriculum recommendations and Bible study guides, an archive of recorded presentations and videos about children's and intergenerational ministry, and a free swap shop where churches can offer and exchange their ministry materials. Resources and content will be added to the website as Hub events take place, presentations are recorded, and materials are licensed for distribution.

## Beyond cohorts

While there will be limited space in each of our cohorts, the possibilities of collaboration with and through the Hub are boundless. Churches and other organizations are invited to attend our Cohort Orientation and Summit events, audit group consultations and workshops, and use our open source online resources. If your church or organization is interested in partnering with the Hub beyond participating in a cohort, please reach out to Spencer Law at [spencer@bridgtonucc.org](mailto:spencer@bridgtonucc.org).

# Western Maine Children's Ministry Hub

## Sharing this opportunity with your congregation

If you think your church might be interested in applying to be part of a cohort, start the conversation now! Churches will have from May 2 to June 13 to write and submit applications, but you can start preparing now by dreaming about your church's vision for innovative, inclusive, intergenerational ministry, identifying who in your congregation will write your application, and who would attend Hub events if your church is selected for a cohort. Below are a few sample blurbs you can use for your bulletin, social media posts, website, newsletter, or any other means of communication your church uses to spread the word. [Click here](#) to download a graphic you can use with these blurbs.



Have you ever imagined how our church could become an even more inclusive and welcoming place for people of all ages? Our neighbors at First Church in Bridgton recently established the Western Maine Children's Ministry Hub, and we have been invited to apply for their church cohort program. Joining the cohort program would give our church access to grant funding, resources, collaborative workshops, and consulting designed to help our church become even more accessible and spiritually nurturing for people of all ages. If you're interested in learning more, or if you want to be involved in the application process this spring, please reach out.



Dear friends, I'm delighted to share that our church has been invited to apply for an exciting opportunity through the Western Maine Children's Ministry Hub, a new center for innovative, inclusive, intergenerational ministry based at First Church in Bridgton. The Hub's upcoming church cohort program invites churches to imagine and develop innovative children's and intergenerational ministries through collaborative workshops, micro-grant funding, resource sharing, personalized consulting, and building relationships with other churches in our area. If you would like to be involved in creating an even more accessible and welcoming environment for people of all ages in our church, please reach out so you can be part of the application process this spring.



Beloved of God, our church has the opportunity to apply to be part of an upcoming program through the Western Maine Children's Ministry Hub, a new center based at First Church in

# Western Maine Children's Ministry Hub

Bridgton that connects churches interested in innovative, inclusive, intergenerational ministry. Their upcoming church cohort program offers resources and support for churches to become even more inclusive, welcoming, and accessible places for people of all ages. Our congregation would have the opportunity to dream about our vision for building an even more inclusive and intergenerational church, work with other churches and professional coaches to turn our dreams into a creative plan, and receive grant funding to put those plans into action. If you want to learn more or get involved in this exciting opportunity, please contact our pastor for more details.

## Contact

If you have any questions, concerns, or if you would like to receive the cohort application directly when it becomes available, please contact Spencer Law at [spencer@bridgtonucc.org](mailto:spencer@bridgtonucc.org).