

**Seminary
Professors**
Summits

The vows we take at the font compel us to partner with congregations and parents to become a more welcoming worshiping community and to nurture the faith of children through worship and prayer. The Font & Faith Initiative is committed to helping the church live into the promises made in baptism by

- providing occasions for critical and sustaining conversations,
 - creating supporting communities on a common journey,
 - researching, developing, and offering resources to strengthen family and congregational ministries that nurture children in worship and prayer,
- so that children's faith and congregations' worship and prayer life are engaged, enriched, and enlivened.

The church and families have long held a mutual and sacred responsibility for nurturing the faith of children. More than a decade ago, Dr. Vern Bengtson's research¹ showed that parents are significant faith educators for their children. More recently, the research of Dr. Christian Smith² confirmed the primary role that families play in cultivating faith, and the life of faith, in children and across generations. Their work recalled the findings of the Search Institute's study in 1990³, which heralded the significance of lifelong involvement of families in worship and Christian education as a common factor in the development of mature faith.

Seminaries and their faculty play a critical role in shaping the identity and culture of congregations by equipping their graduates to

- craft sermons and liturgies that speak to all generations,
- lead shifts in congregational culture to become more welcoming of our young disciples,
- educate and support families as they live into their baptismal vows, and
- develop pastoral relationships that foster a sense of belonging.

Congregations, in turn, shape the identities, values, and practices of children and their families.

This Summit provides a space for seminary professors to assess the ways their courses and practices foster (or don't foster) these ideals and skills.

¹Vern L. Bengtson with Norella M. Punej and Susan Harris, *Families and Faith: How Religion is Passed Down Across Generations* (London: Oxford Press, 2013).

²Christian Smith and Amy Adamczyk, *Handing Down the Faith: How Parents Pass Their Religion on to the Next Generation* (London: Oxford Press, 2020), 189.

³*Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations*, Peter L. Benson and Carolyn H. Ekin.

Summits

Summits are in-person gatherings that convene teams of congregational leaders committed to becoming a more welcoming worshiping community and to nurturing the faith of children through worship and prayer. Our time together will be marked by engaging in

- biblical and theological exploration,
- deep listening and critical conversations,
- examining cultural and contextual realities that present both challenges and possibilities, and
- discovering best practices and emerging ideas.

These summits will shape how we foster leadership, discern what resources need to be developed, and what experiences need to be offered, as we support families and congregations nurturing children through baptismal living.

Dates and Arrangements

The Seminary Professor Summit has the capacity for ten professors who will be joined by at least one artist and one seminary student. Professors should have an interest or responsibility for children and families. The Summit is especially geared for professors in practical theology (worship, homiletics, pastoral care, and Christian education).

We will begin at 10:00 a.m. on Monday, February 2, 2026, and conclude on Tuesday, February 3, 7:30 p.m., 2026, on Union Presbyterian Seminary's Charlotte Campus, 5141 Sharon Road, Charlotte, NC 28210. Since full participation in both days of the event is expected, travel should be arranged for Sunday and Wednesday.

Travel, lodging, food, and materials related to participating in the Summits are covered by a generous grant from Lilly Endowment, Inc. Our Center staff will assist you with all arrangements.

After The Summits

Ministries that nurture faith in children and families through worship and prayer continue after the Summits. We are committed to supporting you in these ministries. Journey Groups will be established after the Summits to facilitate community, sustain your continued commitment, and strengthen your engagement in baptismal living. All Summit participants are expected to participate in Journey Groups where we will provide space for

- sharing intentional Christian practices of worship and prayer with children and families,
- supporting one another along the journey,
- giving voice to celebrations and challenges,
- exploring questions, and
- exchanging ideas.

All interactions will take place through a secure online portal on the Font & Faith website. New resources will also be available to Journey Groups to continue to engage and empower their work.

At the end of the three-year Journey Groups, all Summits will reconvene in their original configuration for a time of celebration and evaluation. These final Summits will dream and plan for future ministry.

Application Process

Summit participants will be selected through an application process. Applications are available on the Font & Faith website:

<https://fontandfaith.cece.upsem.edu/>