



AN INVITATION TO THE

2026 COHORT: THE NEXT CHAPTER

You began something brave. Now you get to discern what comes next.

YOU ARE JUST GETTING STARTED

Culture change is a long game - and one year was never expected to finish it.

During 2026, your congregation listened, imagined, built relationships, and tried new things so **children - especially ages 0-10 - and people of every age might belong more fully in worship and congregational life.** Meaningful intergenerational culture change often takes **three to five years.** The work may still be new, uneven, or unfinished. That does not mean it has failed. It means seeds have been planted.

NO PERFECT FINISH LINE

Your story can be honest, unfinished, and still deeply worthwhile.

NO ONE RIGHT PATH

You may keep exploring with the gathered group or carry the work forward locally.

NO SHAME IN SLOW

Faithful change happens at the pace relationships and real life allow.

REAL LIFE HAPPENED, TOO

Some projects took off. Some changed shape. Some congregations entered pastoral transitions, encountered unexpected challenges, or simply discovered that there was less time and capacity than hoped. Great intentions do not always unfold on schedule. **The Holy Playground is not asking you to pretend otherwise.** Honest learning is part of the story.

MORE THAN ONE FAITHFUL NEXT STEP

Keep exploring together. Reconnect at the 2027 conference and respond to future invitations for shared learning.

Carry it forward at home. Use the core values and what you have learned to guide your congregation's next choices.

Continue with support. If coaching remains helpful, you may choose to keep meeting with a coach.

Make room for real life. You may decide not to add anything new in 2027. A slower pace is not a failure.

YOU ARE NOT STARTING OVER. YOU ARE BUILDING ON WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED.

Whether your next step is shared, independent, big, small, or simply more time to listen, The Holy Playground honors the work already begun.

YOUR 2027 INVITATIONS

Tell the truth. Stay curious.

NOW-FALL 2026

Continue your funded work. Use grant funds as approved, keep track of what you try, and notice who participates, what changes, and what surprises you.

SHARE THE STORY

Every 2026 cohort congregation will be asked to share what it has done - or is doing - with the grant funds received. A changed, unfinished, delayed, or surprising story is still a valuable story.

JAN.-MAR. 2027

Story-sharing Zooms. 2026 congregations will have opportunities to tell what happened, what they learned, and what they are carrying forward so the new cohort can learn right alongside them.

APR. 30- MAY 1

The Holy Playground Conference at Cedar Shore Resort in Oacoma. Every 2026 cohort congregation will be invited to send representation. Come reconnect, hear foundational education from Dr. Christina Embree again, choose from breakout sessions with new information and ideas, and build relationships with both returning and new congregations.

BEYOND THE CONFERENCE

Choose the path that fits. Continue with a coach if useful, respond to invitations for gatherings and learning opportunities, or carry the work forward independently in your own congregation.

The April conference is an invitation, not a new requirement. We hope every 2026 congregation will consider sending someone, especially if transitions, timing, or capacity made the first year difficult.

WHAT WE HOPE YOU WILL SHARE

- What did your congregation hope to try?
- How were the grant funds used - or how will they be used?
- Who was included, heard, or affected?
- What happened, changed, stalled, or surprised you?
- What did you learn about worship, belonging, relationships, or your community?
- What might your congregation carry forward?

WHAT CONTINUING CAN LOOK LIKE

- Send representation to the 2027 conference.
- Join future learning opportunities and gatherings as invited.
- Continue meeting with a coach if that support is useful.
- Return to The Holy Playground core values when making decisions.
- Try another holy experiment when your congregation is ready.
- Complete your cohort commitment and continue the work in your own way.

KEEP THE CORE VALUES CLOSE

BEGIN WITH
BELONGING

DESIGN FOR
RELATIONSHIPS

EVERYONE BRINGS SOMETHING.
EVERYONE NEEDS SOMETHING.

CONSIDER THE MOST
VULNERABLE

YOUR STORY DOES NOT HAVE TO BE TIDY TO BE HOLY.

Tell us what happened, what surprised you, and where you sense the Spirit nudging next. Your honest story can help another congregation take its own brave step.

QUESTIONS?

Pr. Renae Boehmer
Director, The Holy Playground
605-321-4336
rboehmer@sdsynod.org