



AN INVITATION TO THE

2027 CONGREGATIONAL COHORT

A year to begin with belonging, deepen relationships, and take brave new steps together.

WHAT IS THE HOLY PLAYGROUND?

Not another packaged program. A guided process for culture change in worship and congregational life.

The Holy Playground helps congregations create communities where **children - especially ages 0-10 - and people of every age are expected, welcomed, heard, and involved in worship.** That sense of belonging then reaches beyond worship into prayer, fellowship, learning, service, and the whole life of the congregation. Your team will listen to your congregation and community, ask better questions, imagine possibilities, try holy experiments, and learn alongside other congregations. You are not applying with a polished project. You are applying to join the process.

BELONGING FIRST

Children and families should not have to earn a place. They are already part of the body of Christ.

RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

The goal is more than a new activity. We are cultivating connection across generations.

YOUR CONTEXT COUNTS

You know your people and community. The Holy Playground helps you build from what is already there.

THIS COULD BE YOUR CONGREGATION

Your congregation is any size - with many children, a few children, or none at all - and you want relationships across generations to flourish.

You are already experimenting and want to deepen the why behind what you do.

You want fresh imagination for worship, faith formation, hospitality, and community life.

You do not have it all figured out. Curiosity and willingness matter more than perfection.

YOU ALREADY HAVE WHAT YOU NEED.

Any congregation in the South Dakota Synod ELCA may apply. You know your community; we will help you notice what has life, stretch your thinking, build relationships, and choose a next brave step.

WHAT THE YEAR LOOKS LIKE

Learn. Connect. Experiment.

OCT. 15, 2026

Applications open. Gather a team and tell us why this process matters in your setting.

DEC. 15, 2026

Applications are due.

JAN. 5, 2027

Cohort congregations are notified. The application includes an option to request a \$500 mini-grant; the first 20 requests will be funded in January.

JAN.-MAR.

Story-sharing Zooms. Hear what 2026 congregations tried, learned, and are carrying forward.

APRIL 30 -
MAY 1

The Holy Playground Conference at Cedar Shore Resort in Oacoma. Participation is required: every 2027 cohort congregation commits at the time of application to have representatives present. The conference includes intentional relationship-building with other congregations, foundational education from Dr. Christina Embree, a wide variety of breakout sessions, and time to meet the coach who will walk alongside your team throughout the year - plus plenty of room to learn, connect, and imagine together.

MAY 2027 -
APRIL 2028

Learning, connection, and holy experimentation continue. Monthly Zoom calls, in-person gatherings throughout the state, meetings with your congregation's coach, and 1-2 additional opportunities to apply for grant funding for projects your congregation chooses.

SHARE THE
STORY

Help the learning travel. Throughout the year - and as the cohort journey draws to a close - your team will share what you are trying, what you are learning, and what you are wondering next, so other congregations can learn right alongside you.

WHAT YOUR TEAM COMMITS TO

- Form a team of at least three people - not necessarily pastors.
- Participate for the full cohort year.
- Ensure your congregation is represented at the required two-day kick-off conference.
- Join monthly Zooms and in-person gatherings.
- Meet with your congregation's coach.
- Try at least one holy experiment or brave next step.
- Share your story so others can learn with you.

WHAT THE HOLY PLAYGROUND OFFERS

- A community of congregations learning together.
- Practical tools, ready-to-use ideas, and room to imagine.
- Support for leading culture change - not just adding programs.
- Connection through consistent small groups and coaching support.
- Multiple opportunities to apply for grant funding for work your congregation chooses - including a \$500 mini-grant option for the first 20 requests.
- Encouragement to build from your congregation's own gifts.

OUR CORE VALUES

BEGIN WITH BELONGING

DESIGN FOR RELATIONSHIPS

EVERYONE BRINGS SOMETHING. EVERYONE NEEDS SOMETHING.

CONSIDER THE MOST VULNERABLE

READY TO WONDER WHAT IS POSSIBLE?

Bring your curiosity, your people, and the gifts already present in your congregation. We will take the next brave steps together.

APPLY

October 15-December 15

www.sdsynod.org/holyplayground
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