



# Program Description

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*“Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies;  
and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.”*

—Jeremiah 6:16

Believing that our lives of faith depend on the regular practice of reading the Bible, the Faith Formation Collaborative at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary invites congregations on a journey we call “Orienting With the Word” (OWW). This is a program for 21st-century Anabaptists who are eager to practice reading and interpreting the Bible in community with the Spirit’s guidance and curious to find out if something as basic as Bible study can satisfy our contemporary hunger for justice.

Building on Anabaptism’s 500th anniversary, Orienting With the Word’s vision and desire is to help congregations build our confidence and commitment to read the Bible both devotionally and with insights from biblical scholars. Thanks to a grant from Lilly Endowment, Inc., **we are offering this experiential, practice-based program to congregations across the United States and Canada, inviting them to apply for a five-month journey of “reading the Bible as if our lives depend on it”** (see *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology*, Vol. 22 No. 2).

## Program Highlights

Each year of the program we will run two cohorts (January through Pentecost Sunday and August through the Third Sunday of Advent). After your congregation has been accepted into a cohort, you will follow a program path that involves these elements:

- Putting together an Orienting With the Word group to organize your congregation’s participation in the program. OWW groups will be coordinated by a pastor and a lay person.
- Sharing with others about your relationship to the Bible and what shapes your engagement with the Bible as Christianity’s sacred text
- Sending two OWW group members to a two-day Compass Bible Study Retreat and Training Seminar which will equip them with both the theory and skills to lead Confessional Bible Study
- Receiving support from program staff, known as Guides, as your team uses the Confessional Bible Study process to study, wrestle with, and be fed by the Word
- Joining with other congregations in your cohort to form a virtual learning community

## Program Components



### Confessional Bible Study

While the name can be confusing, Confessional Bible Study (CBS) begins with the view that the Bible is so expansive and generous that it can speak into the messy complexity of our lives in trustworthy ways, which we all need. This is why you will hear us say that CBS is

about “reading the Bible as if our lives depend on it,” because they do. CBS also affirms that God wants ordinary people, gathered as an interpretive community, to know the blessing that comes from wrestling together to make life-giving sense of our sacred text.

Following a pattern of three basic movements — study and engagement, artful response, and worship — CBS takes practice, especially if we have not been taught to approach or relate to the Bible as expansive and generous. The Compass Bible Study Retreat and Training Seminar will focus on both ideas at the heart of CBS and practical tips to help OWW group members share the practice in their congregations.



### **Orienting With the Word Groups**

While the primary purpose of Orienting With the Word is to share a particular practice of Bible study, OWW also has a leadership development component that takes shape in each congregation’s OWW group. While OWW groups will vary in size, each will begin with two coordinators – a pastor and a layperson. Then, as the journey unfolds, your OWW group — a faith formation class, a committee, a small group, etc. — will be joined by OWW Guides. Guides give counsel in areas like spiritual formation, biblical interpretation, group facilitation, and leadership development with the goal of helping your OWW group share the work of facilitating CBS sessions, giving everyone in the group the opportunity to lead.

In this way, the leadership style we encourage OWW groups to use is rooted and grounded in AMBS’s commitment to shared leadership. Decidedly Anabaptist in character, this way of leading emphasizes forming communities that pay attention to the movement of God’s Spirit, use critical reflection to inform their practice of Christian faith, and make good use of everyone’s gifts by sharing power in the priesthood of all believers.

### **Faith Formation Collaborative**

Inspired by the Valparaíso Project on the Education and Formation of People in Faith, AMBS’s Faith Formation Collaborative uses the language of “Christian Practices” to guide its work. As a program of the Collaborative, Orienting With the Word will focus participants’ attention on Christian Practices like reading scripture in community and bearing witness to God’s work in our lives. You will also find inspiration to reflect on the wider range of practices that make up the Christian life in general, and Anabaptist-Mennonite discipleship in particular. Use this link to learn more about the practices the Faith Formation Collaborative highlights in its work: [Faith Formation’s List of Christian Practices](#).

### **Contact Us**

For more information, read the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) document. To apply to this program, use the Orienting With the Word [Application Form](#) or, for a paper application, contact:

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<https://ambs.edu/orienting-with-the-word>