PORTRAITS OF THRIVING

VIDEO DISCUSSION GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

A hand-painted portrait takes hours upon hours of creative time. It is normal for a subject to sit for a portrait for around six hours so that the artist can capture their details as well as their general demeanor. Portraits can, and often do, convey their subject's *essence*. I wonder, when is the last time you took a stroll through an art museum and noticed the portraits? What did they capture: dignity, contentment, resolve?

Portraits of Thriving is a video series meant to capture the essence of what it means to thrive. These are not snapshots taken quickly and reflecting only a fleeting moment. The intention of each of these portraits is to honor the time and investment of a congregation's lay leaders and ministerial staff over years and even decades of discerning the call of God to love and serve their communities.

The ministers featured in these portraits—James, Mari, Mark, Melissa, Sara, and Steve—were all members of the 2024 multi-vocational ministers' cohort funded by the Thriving in Ministry grant CBF received from Lilly Endowment Inc. They are called to the vocations of educator, lifelong learner, family member, and full-time employee in various fields in addition to their callings as pastors. I hope that you can see and hear from these portraits that compelling clarity, rooted relationships, holy tenacity, faithful agility, and dynamic collaboration are evident in all of them and their congregations even though each video portrait is highlighting one trait.

Spending a year in community with these ministers—hearing their stories and the stories of their congregations—enriched my understanding of ministry and gave me a profound sense of gratitude for all the ways they are exhibiting the traits of thriving both personally and as a church. As you view this series, I hope you will *really see* some of the best of who the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is.

Many churches and leaders are holding tightly to a faded Polaroid—a snapshot of glory days past that they believe should be the present. If that is you, I invite you to put down the Polaroid and pick up a paintbrush. Look at the history of your congregation and how it has flourished through the years and where it is flourishing now. What is its essence? How have you lived into your calling? How are you embodying the traits of thriving? Where might you see the greatest opportunity for growth?

In answering these questions and the reflection questions with each video, may you begin to see your own portrait of thriving emerge. Each church and each minister is far more than their most flattering snapshot or highlight reel. The portrait may take longer, but truly thriving is worth every minute.

Here's hoping we will thrive together,

Kelly Adams
Director of Clergy Support

COMPELLING CLARITY

Knowing who you are as a congregation, your mission and how to communicate it clearly to inspire action and focus.

MELISSA ROYSDON

Being true to who you are enables you to be the best that you can be.

- What do we do best? What should we stop trying to do?
- If we had to describe our church in one sentence, what would it be?
- How do you feel called by God in your current stage of life? How do we understand our congregation's calling?

"Jesus noticed everyone."

- Who are the "unseen" in our zip code? How are we noticing them?
- Where might the presence of dignity need to be strengthened in our approach?
- What would courageous reimagining look like for us?
- What truth are we hesitant to name?
- What would bold faithfulness look like during the next 12 months?

FAITHFUL AGILITY

Adapting creatively and effectively to change while staying aligned with your congregation's mission and long-term vision.

JAMES BRIGGS

Thriving can be defined as members being excited and sharing their excitement with others.

- How would we define "thriving" for our church?
- Would people in our congregation describe us as something they're excited to share?
- What would have to change for us to feel that kind of energy?

Faithful agility means not putting God "in a box" and looking for ways to make things work rather than delineating all the reasons they can't.

- Where are we currently saying, "We can't do that because..."? and what might it look like to ask instead, "How could we do that?"
- What connections can we make that will support our agility?
- What structures (buildings, traditions, expectations) might be limiting our imagination?
- How have we practiced faithful agility since the Covid-19 pandemic? What are small ways we can practice agility more often?
- How do we see agility in other organizations and institutions? What can we learn from them?

ROOTED RELATIONSHIPS

Building deep, meaningful connections within and beyond the congregation that nurture faith and clarify God's calling.

MARI WILES

A thriving congregation must be curious, relational and honest.

- Where are we being honest about who we are today?
- Where might we still be living in "the way it used to be"?
- How do we help people move from attending to belonging?
- What does belonging look like in our congregation?
- When have you experienced someone "showing up" in a way that mattered?
- Where might fear more than faith be shaping our decisions?
- How are you tending the "seeds of love" in your congregation and community?
- How can we strengthen intergenerational or cross-community connections?

DYNAMIC COLLABORATION

Working together across diverse teams and partnerships to innovate and achieve shared goals in ministry.

MARK BUHLIG

Thriving must fit within a holistic picture of life — "Some days are diamonds and some days are dirt clouds."

- How have we defined thriving in the past? Does thriving always mean growth in numbers? Are we trying to be who we used to be, or who we are now?
- Where do we see health in our congregation right now?
- Who are the people and organizations in the community who might align with our current identity? Whom do we want to serve?

Dynamic Collaboration means doing more together than we can do on your own.

- How are we already collaborating?
- What is it that we are aiming to do that needs the collaboration of others?
- How might dynamic collaboration mean meeting people who might not otherwise enter the doors of our church building? What might that mean for our church?

Englewood describes itself as a micro-church and embraces that identity fully.

- What is our congregation's honest identity today?
- What grief do we carry about past seasons?
- What freedom might come from embracing who we are now?
- What would it look like to see our current size as a "superpower" instead of a weakness?
- What decision would require humility and generosity rather than institutional pride?

HOLY TENACITY

Persevering with steadfast faith in the face of challenges, staying true to your core mission and values.

SARAH HERRINGTON JONES

Holy tenacity can be defined as perseverance in the face of adversity.

- What adversities does our congregation face?
- What have we faced in the past that we have overcome together with our tenacity and grit?
- Where are we tempted to retreat instead of persevering?
- What would holy tenacity look like for us this year?
- How do we stay faithful when the wider culture feels hostile or uncertain?

Transformation happens when individuals are fully welcomed without conditions.

- Does everyone who walks into our church feel fully seen?
- Are there implicit conditions placed on belonging?
- What practices help create genuine safety and affirmation?
- What does it mean to tell someone, “You belong you here”?
- Where is God calling us to persevere with love instead of fear?

OVERVIEW VIDEO

Review the definitions of the traits on preceding pages and listen carefully for how you see them in the clergy and congregations featured here.

- How is your congregation already living into these traits?
- How are you cultivating these traits personally?
- Where is there the most opportunity for growth?
- Which trait do you feel is the strongest? Why?
- Pay attention to the benefits and challenges of multi-vocational ministers. Would your church consider a position that is multi-vocational? Why or why not?