



CONNECT
CHURCH

Connect Church

Connect Church helps rural churches strengthen their communities through asset-based community development. Connect Church has now served more than 100 churches across North Carolina since 2018. After completing the one-year coaching program, churches learn how to identify and mobilize local assets to create lasting change. Each year, a new cohort of church teams embarks on this journey, gaining practical tools, personalized coaching, and access to funding opportunities.

Our vision is a nationwide network of partners equipped to support rural churches as vital community institutions. Through dedicated training, financial investment, and ongoing coaching, Connect Church Hub Partners will launch Virtual Connect, an asynchronous version of the Connect Church initiative. Participating churches will receive small implementation grants, matched by their own contributions, to foster sustainability and shared ownership. Additionally, participating churches will receive a small contribution for participating in real-time evaluations that will guide continuous refinement, adapting the program to diverse regional contexts. Each church will be fully engaged in the Connect Church model, strengthening rural ministries and revitalizing communities across the nation.

What We Offer

- **Virtual Training & Support:** Hub partners receive support to start a Virtual Connect Church initiative in their state or region, including ongoing coaching from the FIRC team.
- **Asset-Based Church Development:** Churches receive training in leveraging congregational strengths and community assets to create impactful missional engagement plans.
- **Cohort-Based Learning:** Church teams meet in person to learn and grow together while engaging with virtual, interactive teaching sessions. Each gathering blends online instruction with in-person collaboration, peer connection, and practical implementation strategies.
- **Extensive Partner Investment:** Hub partners receive \$100,000 in funding over one year to provide one Virtual Connect Church cohort, comprising 25 rural congregations, and engage in a national peer network.
- **Scalable Rural Church Engagement:** Denominations, networks, and organizations are equipped to support rural churches with proven methods tailored to their regional needs.

“By recognizing and leveraging the unique gifts, talents and resources present in our midst, we not only fulfill the church’s mission but also ignite a ripple effect of transformation that empowers individuals, nurtures relationships, and breathes life into our shared vision of love, service, and purpose.”



Hub Partner Commitment

- Program Oversight & Leadership - Provide strategic leadership to ensure the successful implementation and sustainability of Virtual Connect Church in the region.
- Recruit & Support Participating Churches - Identify and onboard churches, ensuring they are prepared to engage in asset-based community development and sustained missional work.
- Lead Program Evaluations & Continuous Improvement – Administer \$1,000 evaluation grants, collect program data, collaborating with the NC Rural Center to enhance future learning, strengthen outcomes, and expand Connect Church’s impact.
- Manage & Oversee Implementation Grants - Administer and track \$1,000 implementation grants, ensuring effective use in launching or expanding church-led community initiatives.
- Provide Post-Grant Coaching & Sustainability Support - Offer ongoing coaching and resources to help churches sustain their initiatives and navigate challenges beyond the grant period.

The Process

Spring 2026 - Potential Hub Partner Exploration Conversations

Fall 2026 - Hub Partner Onboarding and Launch

A Story of Success:

**The Carteret Mother’s Care Program St. Peter’s United Methodist Church
– Morehead City, NC**

St. Peter’s United Methodist Church in Morehead City, NC, partnered with the community to address food insecurity among pregnant mothers and newborns. Through the Connect Church Program, they developed the Carteret Mother’s Care Program, now serving 32 prenatal mothers with nutritionist-designed food boxes. After discovering Connect Church through the NC Rural Center, Bill Douglass and the church team identified a critical need for maternal nutrition. With support from local healthcare providers, they launched the initiative, overcoming challenges to improve maternal and fetal health. Partnerships with organizations like the North Carolina Medical Society and Carteret OB-GYN Associates have been key to the program’s success. St. Peter’s hopes to inspire other churches to take similar action in their communities.

If you have any questions about this program or the application, contact Virtual Connect Program Manager Elizabeth Styron at estyron@ncruralcenter.org.