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Lilly Endowment awards theological school grants to “make connections”

Twenty-three theological schools nationwide have received grants in the Making Connections Initiative, an effort by Lilly Endowment Inc. to help these schools nourish a new “ecology of ministry.” The schools will establish programs to energize and expand existing efforts to call a new generation of bright young people to the Christian ministry, educate them well, and nurture excellence among practicing clergy. The Indianapolis-based Endowment has invested \$42.5 million in this competitive grants initiative.

All the programs include highly collaborative components to enrich this “new ecology of ministry” that is developing among people and institutions responsible for the quality and care of congregations – ministers, parishioners, theological schools, colleges and universities, denominational officials and other agencies that serve churches.

Making Connections is the latest Endowment initiative to address issues facing many Christian denominations in recent decades: declining numbers of young people entering the ministry, the “dropout” rate among new ministers, and the often-felt “isolation” of practicing pastors. Yet in the past few years signs of change have been appearing: the number of young people under the age of 30 entering seminary is rising sharply; many theological school leaders are reporting that their new classes are the largest and brightest they have had in 20 or 30 years.

“Through scores of new programs that have been created in recent years, the institutions that are responsible for the calling, training and sustaining of pastoral leaders

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are no longer so isolated from one another. Rather, they are working together in ways that are mutually supportive and very creative,” said Craig Dykstra, Endowment vice president for religion. “These institutions are realizing that they can turn the situation around. As young people have responded to their programs and initiatives, they realize they can actually make a difference. That gives them new hope, energy and confidence. This new initiative aims to help seminaries keep the momentum going and enable them and their partners to take the next steps to continue to improve the quality of ministry.”

All schools accredited by the Association of Theological Schools were invited to participate in this competitive initiative, which was announced in November 2003. The Endowment has now approved 21 program implementation grants for 23 theological schools across the country. (One grant, to the Eastern Cluster of Lutheran Seminaries, benefits three schools.)

These schools have, for the most part, decided to focus their attention on several key goals: establishing and strengthening connections with congregations; creating programs for beginning pastors to benefit from the wisdom of experienced ministers; involving congregations in both calling young people to ministry and supporting recent seminary graduates as they make the transition into pastoral ministry; and establishing or expanding programs for urban or rural ministries.

“We anticipate that the partnerships established or enhanced through the Making Connections Initiative will strengthen the ecology of institutions necessary to equip a new generation of church leaders, just as it seeks to sustain excellent ministry going on today,” Dykstra said.

The following theological schools have received implementation grants in the Making Connections Initiative:

AQUINAS INSTITUTE OF THEOLOGY, St. Louis, \$1,711,037

THE APOLLOS PROJECT

Building on a previous Endowment grant, the institute plans to help improve the quality of parish ministry by establishing educational partnerships with dozens of parishes in the

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greater St. Louis area. The school's project will encourage more active parish participation in identifying and selecting excellent ministry candidates and will train working pastors in skills for collaborating with new ministers. A key component will be close relationships the school will establish with 35 carefully chosen parishes. The school will award a "ministry fellowship" to a talented layperson in each parish who will obtain graduate education to serve as a minister in that local church. This experimental method of recruiting and training effective ecclesial leaders may become a model for the parishes in the area and the country.

ASSOCIATED MENNONITE BIBLICAL SEMINARY (AMBS), Elkhart, Ind., \$1,588,954
ENGAGING PASTORS

The seminary will improve ministerial education by strengthening its connections with Mennonite pastors. AMBS professors and excellent pastors nationwide will interact through pastor-faculty colloquies on central aspects of ministry, gatherings with recent graduates, extended visits by faculty to congregations, teaching residencies by pastors at AMBS, and other activities.

BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY AT RICHMOND (VA.) (BTSR), \$1,999,899
THE NETWORK FOR MINISTERIAL EXCELLENCE

The seminary plans to foster excellence among its graduates in their crucial first five years of ministry, particularly among women pastors. Along with key partners such as the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF), the Center for Congregational Health at Wake Forest University and the Virginia Baptist Women in Ministry, BTSR will establish a network of mentors for new clergy and offer continuing education opportunities. The project also will work in concert with other CBF-related seminaries and agencies to strengthen the recruitment and deployment systems for pastors in this movement.

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY, \$1,999,883

THE CENTER FOR PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

The school plans to create a Center for Practical Theology that will build new programs to serve area churches and blend congregational experience and ministerial training more effectively. Under the auspices of the center, the Congregational Research and Development project (begun with a previous Endowment grant) will deepen and expand its work with dozens of Boston-area congregations, as well as its effort to start new congregations in cooperation with the New England United Methodist Annual Conference. Similarly, the Spiritual Formation and Church Life project will establish spiritual-growth peer groups for pastors that will in turn help guide the development of new seminary courses and spiritual formation experiences for ministry students. In these ways, the new center will strengthen connections among faculty, students and pastors, as well as among the school, congregations and denominations.

CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, Grand Rapids, Mich., \$1,999,800

CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY AS A CATALYST FOR PASTORAL EXCELLENCE

The seminary plans to deepen a renewed ecology of ministry that is emerging in the Christian Reformed Church. The seminary will be a catalyst to call, train and sustain excellent pastors through three initiatives:

- A pre-seminary initiative will focus on vocational discernment with the goal of increasing the numbers of promising individuals who enter seminary with a commitment to the ministry;
- An in-seminary initiative will focus on reorienting academic programs and field education around the concept of “theological education as formation for ministry,” with the goal of more effectively preparing students for congregational ministry;
- A post-seminary sustaining initiative will strengthen collaborative connections between the seminary, pastors and congregations.

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CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL UNION AT CHICAGO (CTU), \$2 million

THE CATHOLICS ON CALL INITIATIVE

The school plans to implement a new collaborative program with 25 religious communities that formally sponsor the school. CTU and its partners will encourage college students and young adults to consider a life of service to the church as priests, religious brothers or sisters, or as lay ministers in local parishes. The new initiative will be national in scope and will involve extensive interaction among CTU's partners through intensive regional and national recruitment programs and conferences.

CHICAGO THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, \$2 million

MAKING THE CONNECTIONS

The seminary will build on a previous Endowment grant to make congregationally based training a central feature of the school's program. Three cooperating churches will become fully developed teaching sites, and students will spend a year in them engaged with pastors, lay leaders, faculty and other students. A new component will add doctoral students to this mix as teaching partners. This role will help train new cohorts of future seminary faculty who can promote this model when they become teachers themselves.

CHURCH OF GOD SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY (CGST), Cleveland, Tenn., \$2 million

COVENANT LEADERSHIP

The school plans to expand a strong partnership with its denomination which began through the Endowment's Sustaining Pastoral Excellence program. CGST's program provides pastors with support and resources that are pioneering a new understanding of pastoral excellence in this Pentecostal denomination. The partners will expand the program to meet the huge demand for it expressed by pastors. The school will revise its practical theology and spiritual formation curriculum around a newly emerging Pentecostal understanding of ministerial and congregational practices.

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EASTERN CLUSTER OF LUTHERAN SEMINARIES, Gettysburg, Pa., \$3 million
CONNECT—CALLING LEADERS FOR A CHANGING WORLD

The Eastern Cluster of Lutheran Seminaries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America comprises the Lutheran School of Theology at Gettysburg (Pa.), the Lutheran School of Theology at Philadelphia and the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia, S.C. The group will strengthen collaboration among a variety of denominational institutions to identify and nurture a new generation of parish ministers. This project supports a network of partners, including Lutheran pastors and congregations, church camps and counselors, colleges and campus ministries (Muhlenberg, Thiel and Newberry colleges), the Lutheran Student Movement and the Lutheran Service Corps.

INTERDENOMINATIONAL THEOLOGICAL CENTER (ITC), Atlanta, \$1,999,925
FAITH JOURNEY

ITC plans to strengthen the pool of young African Americans entering seminary and succeeding in congregational ministry by intensifying the connections the center already is building with high school youth, college students, congregations and pastors. The project targets four age groups:

- promising high schoolers chosen from ITC's Endowment-funded Youth Hope-Builders Academy;
- college students preparing for ministry who are identified through campus ministries at nearby Morehouse and Spelman colleges and Clark Atlanta University;
- talented master of divinity students from ITC's own constituent seminaries; and
- first-year ITC graduates making the transition into parish ministry.

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More than 250 students, pastors, faculty and other community leaders will participate through mentoring programs, special gatherings and programming, peer learning and various experiences in actual parish ministry settings.

JESUIT SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY, Berkeley, Calif., \$1,999,922

PROGRAM FOR ADVANCING CROSS-CULTURAL MINISTRY INITIATIVES

The project will target persons to pursue church vocations in two burgeoning groups in the San Francisco Bay-area Catholic population: Latinos and Asians. A key element of the project is partnership with Jesuit colleges and post-college volunteer mission programs.

LANCASTER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY (LTS), Lancaster, Pa., \$1,907,000

BUILDING AN ECOLOGY FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION – PREPARING LEADERS FOR MINISTRY

Funds will be used to complete a comprehensive Alliance for Renewal of Ministry program to help church leaders discern, prepare for and implement their call to ministry. LTS will expand its work with several area denominational groups to create two new education programs: a yearlong Academy of Lay Leadership and Ministry to target local lay ministers who are leading congregations and Wholeness in Ministry to address the special concerns of seminary graduates making the transition into full-time ministry.

McCORMICK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, Chicago, \$1,904,543

MAKING CHURCH CONNECTIONS

The seminary will establish a program that will encourage a new generation of Asian American young adults to pursue the call to Christian pastoral ministry. The school will host national and regional gatherings of Asian American young adults focused on vocation and the call to ministry. Through the school's emerging Center for Asian American Ministries, a national network of connections that does not currently exist will

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be built with Asian American pastors, college and seminary students, and leaders of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and other denominations.

MERCER UNIVERSITY, Macon, Ga., (McAfee School of Theology), \$1,999,083
A MAKING CONNECTIONS INITIATIVE PROJECT

The grant will enable the university's McAfee School of Theology to create a program to help its graduates make a good transition into the ministry. Research by the school shows that new graduates who serve churches with multistaff structures and a mentoring senior pastor have a higher retention rate in ministry than those who work as the solo pastor in smaller congregations. In response, McAfee has recruited a number of supportive churches and talented mentor pastors who will provide a two-year, congregation-based mentoring program for new seminary graduates so that new pastors of small congregations, as well as those working in multistaff settings, can get a good start in their ministries.

NEW YORK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY (NYTS), \$2 million
ECOLOGIES OF LEARNING

NYTS will launch a new program for training pastors who will minister in urban settings. NYTS will engage pastors, congregations, denominational and social agency leaders, professors and students in efforts to understand the urban contexts in which they serve. Through a growing consortium that includes seminaries from beyond New York state, NYTS will likely become a valuable training center where seminaries nationwide can send their students who want specialized training to serve in urban congregations.

NORTH PARK COLLEGE AND THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, Chicago, \$1,999,758
A MAKING CONNECTIONS INITIATIVE PROJECT

The seminary wishes to deepen its connections with the Evangelical Covenant Church and North Park University to recruit and train high-quality pastors. The project includes

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setting up a youth theological institute, establishing new patterns of collaboration between the seminary and North Park's office of university ministries, and enabling the seminary to make better connections with pastors and congregations through parallel pastor-in-residence and professor-in-residence programs.

PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY IN VIRGINIA, Alexandria, Va., \$1,893,103

THE SUMMER COLLEGIUM

The seminary will launch a project aimed at strengthening the ministries of pastors serving small-membership churches. The ecumenical program will provide an intensive residential summer program on the campus for seasoned clergy serving small parishes. It will address their needs by nurturing collegial habits for these pastors who serve in settings where distance or church size often exacerbates clergy isolation. The project also will foster ecumenical practices conducive to excellent ministry.

ST. MEINRAD ARCHABBEY, St. Meinrad, Ind., \$1,733,402

ST. MEINRAD INSTITUTE FOR PRIESTS AND PRESBYTERATES

St. Meinrad School of Theology plans to help seminary graduates make a solid transition into local parish ministry in their home dioceses. The program will provide mentoring, peer group experiences and spiritual direction for the newly ordained as they become assistant priests and experience parish ministry for the first time. The project also will assist these new priests as they become pastors of their own parishes and will pilot programs to foster an environment in a diocese that will nurture excellent ministry among new priests and pastors.

SETON HALL UNIVERSITY, South Orange, N.J., \$2 million

THE INSTITUTE FOR CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

The university plans for its Immaculate Conception Seminary School of Theology to establish a permanent Institute for Christian Spirituality. The institute will engage in

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collaborative efforts with the Archdiocese of Newark, other regional dioceses and many parishes in the area. Programs will include partnerships with parishes to strengthen family, children, youth and music ministries, as well as classes and retreats to help participants learn about and reflect upon books by the great spiritual writers of the past and present. Other programs will allow young professionals who are unsatisfied in their careers to discern new vocational directions for their lives. The institute's chief purpose is to attract young adults into activities of spiritual growth and vocational discernment that will lead many of them to seek theological education and become pastoral leaders in their congregations.

WASHINGTON THEOLOGICAL UNION (WTU), \$1,838,959

EYE ON THE HORIZON

WTU will form partnerships to undertake several initiatives to address what project leaders call the “parish leadership crisis facing American Catholicism.” The project will convene church leaders to discuss emerging models of leadership in the church. Project partners (Catholic Campus Ministry Association, National Association of Diocesan Directors of Campus Ministry, National Catholic Student Union, National Catholic Young Adult Ministry Association and others) will work with WTU to establish a “feeder system” to recruit, guide and train talented young people to become priests and professional parish leaders.

WESLEY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, Washington, \$2 million

FORMING PARTNERSHIPS TO SUSTAIN THE EMERGING GENERATION OF PASTORAL LEADERS

The seminary plans to strengthen established partnerships with four United Methodist annual conferences to foster a coordinated focus on excellence in ministry. The program will engage faculty and staff, pastors and conference leaders in four projects:

- making the transition from seminary to parish ministry;

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- training and providing resources for ministry in urban settings;
- providing help and training for the distinctive challenges of ministry in rural areas; and
- leading meaningful and faithful worship for the emerging generation of young people whose musical and liturgical preferences differ from previous generations.

“In the past few years, many individuals and institutions have begun to realize how important it is to support and strengthen congregations and the pastors who lead them,” Dykstra said. “Theological schools in this program have reached out and found eager partners, sometimes in surprising places. We are pleased to offer resources that help bring together talented people in American Christianity so they can forge the partnerships needed to strengthen ministry in congregations in this country. It is an exciting journey.”