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Lilly Endowment invests \$25.3 million to expand theological school programs for young people

Teenagers from across the country will be invited to deepen their faith through theological study and to explore the needs and demands of Christian ministry in 16 new programs funded by Indianapolis-based Lilly Endowment Inc. In an effort to attract talented young people to the ministry as a vocation, the Endowment has encouraged divinity schools and seminaries to devise programs to help young people think about theology and the ministry.

In this round of the “Theological Programs for High School Youth” initiative, 16 theological schools have received a total of \$25.3 million. Over the past decade, 33 other schools have received implementation grants, and the Endowment has invested a total of \$57.3 million in the initiative, which now involves 49 schools.

“What we are hearing ‘from the field’ is most encouraging,” says Craig Dykstra, Endowment vice president for religion. “Reports from pastors, parents, theological educators and the teens themselves indicate that these programs are hitting their intended mark. Young people have been captivated by an in-depth study of the wisdom of the Christian tradition, their faith has been strengthened, and many are beginning to explore vocations of service in Christian ministry.

“The ministry is a demanding and exciting profession, and it takes special people with many skills to be successful. We think that talented young people – at pivotal points in their lives – should be made be aware of the tremendous rewards of pastoral ministry, of what a privilege it is to walk alongside people in their spiritual journeys and to be

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close to them at many of the great turning points of their lives. It is a most gratifying and fulfilling vocation.”

The initiative addresses one area of the Endowment’s two major and interrelated goals in its religion grantmaking: to attract a new generation of talented persons to the ministry while honoring the high calling of pastors serving congregations now – and to help build vibrant and healthy congregations throughout the country.

The following schools have received grants in this round of the program:

Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind., \$1,879,536. Funds will launch Explore, a program that will identify highly motivated high school students from Mennonite churches across the country each year and engage them in theological reflection and in an exploration of possibilities for vocation in church ministry. The youth will take part in an 18-day summer session, followed by a five-week congregational volunteer assignment under the guidance of a pastor-mentor.

Azusa (Calif.) Pacific University, \$1,715,191. The university’s Haggard Graduate School of Theology will institute a Youth Leadership Institute (YLI), which will involve both young people and those who work with them in an intensive two-week summer conference on theology and ministry, mentoring relationships between youth and pastors, a youth theology curriculum for local congregations, a network of area youth workers and seminary faculty, and a program to track participants.

Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, Richmond, Va., \$1,998,903. The Samuel Project will identify young people who show evidence of a call to ministry and nurture them in that call. Working with two Baptist colleges, a camp ministry organization and denominational offices, the seminary will organize vocational exploration sessions at regional and national youth conferences, sponsor a national youth camp, and create resources to help congregations encourage young people to consider the ministry.

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Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, \$2 million. The Peacebuilders Initiative will prepare Catholic high-school-age youth for active leadership roles in their schools and parishes. The annual, yearlong program will involve individual mentoring, summer seminars, theological reflection, on-site ministry experience and weekend retreats.

Chicago Theological Seminary, \$1,999,162. DEPTH will be a three-part program including Discovery Weekends; Partners-in-Service Weekends involving social-service ministries, and Exploration Weeks during which youth will explore theological themes, the nature of ministry, and the range of Christian ministry possibilities.

Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, \$1,295,278. Funds will support Disciples House for Youth which each year will work with area congregations to identify youth and adult sponsors who will complete two, nine-day residential experiences over two summers. Youth will study biblical texts and Christian spiritual practices of prayer and service, interact with mentors, and reflect theologically on the nature and meaning of Christian vocation.

Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, Va., \$2 million. The grant on behalf of Eastern Mennonite Seminary will support LEAP (Learning, Exploring and Participating), a broad-based effort to engage high school youth. The program will include an annual 28-day summer program for high school seniors-to-be involving theological and biblical study, ministry exploration in an urban or rural setting and a mission trip. After the summer program youth will be linked with mentors for the following year. Also, the seminary will provide a year-round leadership program for an inner-city Mennonite high school and produce resources for congregations.

Iliff School of Theology, Denver, \$1,246,649. Funds will support FaithTrek, a multiyear program that will approach theological inquiry from a variety of faith perspectives and expose youth to a range of social and cultural contexts. The program includes an annual three-week summer residential program, an ongoing mentoring relationship with an adult, and follow-up retreats on the theme of ministry and vocation.

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The program also will host annual retreats for adult youth workers to train them in how to support youth in vocational exploration.

Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, \$1,999,231. Funds will establish the Youth Hope-Builders Academy, a program for African American high school youth. The program will involve an annual four-week summer residential academy for young people that involves Christian identity and vocational exploration, service-learning opportunities, worship experiences and mentoring relationships. Three follow-up community-based forums each year will reinforce the residential program and create a network of parents, pastors, youth ministers, community leaders and the seminary to support the youth.

Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, \$1,674,959. Funds will support Serving Christ in the World, an intensive, three-week residential summer program that will take place in Chicago and Mexico City. Serving students from diverse backgrounds, the program will challenge and nurture students' faith, deepen their spiritual formation through experiences with Christians from other cultures, foster a maturing commitment to the church, and encourage youth to consider leadership within the church.

Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg (Pa.), \$591,659. Funds will support a set of initiatives including the Affirmation of Baptism Festival, an annual one-day event; the Crossroads Event, a seven-day experience for juniors-to-be; the Summer Theology Academy, a two-week intense residential program for older youth conducted in collaboration with the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, and the Counselor-in-Training Ministry for counselors in youth camps.

Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, Fresno, Calif., \$1,598,190. Funds will establish Teens Hearing the Call of God, an initiative to encourage Mennonite Brethren youth to explore God's call in their lives. The project will support congregations in nurturing potential leaders, engage youth in theological reflection through weekend retreats and Web-based resources, and create a network of partnerships with church agencies.

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Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, Calif., \$1,965,520. Funds will launch a project aimed at preparing a new generation of leaders especially for churches populated largely by Christians of Asian or Pacific Islands heritage. Program will include summer institutes involving high school youth, video discussions on the generation gap within churches, the production of Bible studies and curriculum on youth ministry and leadership development, and the promotion of innovative teaching congregations.

Queen's Theological College, Kingston, Ontario, Canada, \$855,120. Funds will launch Future Quest, an annual residential program for high school youth. The 21-day program will include theological and biblical study, worship, vocational reflection, spiritual disciplines, service in social ministries, and a three-day placement in a congregation or ministry setting. A reunion retreat in the spring will provide an opportunity to reflect on the experience.

St. Paul School of Theology, Kansas City, Mo., \$1,078,118. Funds will support a program for United Methodist high school youth from the Midwest. Components include forming an annual yearlong Youth Theological Working Group that will involve youth in weekend retreats focused on studying Wesleyan theology, exploring Christian ministry, working with local pastors as mentors, and participating in a Wesleyan heritage trip to England. The program also includes planning regional vocational exploration events for youth and developing a youth leadership curriculum for congregations.

Southern Methodist University, Dallas, \$1,428,412. Perkins School of Theology at SMU will establish the Perkins Youth School of Theology, a leadership development program for high school youth in the Southwest who have experienced disadvantages through their racial minority status or socioeconomic background. The program includes connecting youth who are involved in community service with clergy mentors, hosting an annual three-week summer academy, and sponsoring scholarly research on youth and the church.

Addendum: Other theological schools and seminaries that are participants in this initiative:

Andover Newton Theological Seminary, New Centre, Mass.
Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Mich.
Concordia College, St. Louis
Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.
Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis
Duke University, Durham, N.C.
Eden Theological Seminary, St. Louis
Emmanuel School of Religion, Johnson City, Tenn.
Emory University, Candler School of Theology
Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, Calif.
Gardner-Webb University, Boiling Springs, N.C.
Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, Ill.
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, Mass.
Huron College, London, Ontario, Canada
Lancaster (Pa.) Theological Seminary of the United Church of Christ
Lincoln (Ill.) Christian College and Seminary
Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn.
Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia
Multnomah School of the Bible, Portland, Ore.
Newman Theological Center, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
North American Baptist Seminary, Sioux Falls, S.D.
Pacific Lutheran School of Theology, Berkeley, Calif.
Pittsburgh Theological Seminary
Reformed Presbyterian Theological School, Pittsburgh
St. Francis (Wis.) Seminary
St. John's University School of Theology, Collegeville, Minn.
St. Mary's Seminary and University, Baltimore
St. Meinrad (Ind.) Archabbey
Southern California School of Theology, Claremont, Calif.
Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Columbus, Ohio
Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education,
Richmond, Va.
Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa
Western Seminary, Portland, Ore.

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