



## The Report of the Eastern Cluster of Lutheran Seminaries

**An established Cluster of seminaries** adapts to change in its make up and continues a legacy of grants for innovation and the continuation of collaboration to be good stewards of the resources for theological education and now even a bequest.

The Eastern Cluster has again been the recipient of a major grant from the Lilly Endowment. *The Abundant Life: The Seminaries Address the Economic Challenges Facing Future Ministers*, a grant of \$750,000 addresses student debt in the preparation for public ministry. It represents three experiments in one program to make theological education for public ministry more affordable. An overarching component of The Abundant Life endeavor will be research to determine the overall impact on Lutheran ministers of beginning their careers with a heavy load of debt accrued during undergraduate and theological studies. Five experimental initiatives envisioned at the three schools will help reduce costs of theological education. All three schools will strengthen courses in stewardship and expand financial coaching so that every student has access to personal counseling in managing money, minimizing expenses, and becoming stronger leaders in congregational stewardship. Each school will use a portion of the grant to revise and streamline the educational process; for many students, the time required to complete a Master of Divinity degree may be shortened by a semester or more, thereby reducing the overall cost of preparing to serve as an ordained minister. The schools will also develop new grant-supported fundraising efforts to build their scholarship pools and offer greater financial aid to students with need.

Philadelphia will pioneer a FAR (Flexible, Affordable, Relevant) curricular approach; at Gettysburg, many students will shorten their time in seminary through a competencies-based approach in which they can meet requirements on the basis of prior educational or vocational credentials; Southern will pilot test an “articulation” agreement with Lenoir-Rhyne University through which some students may shorten substantially their total years spent in undergraduate and theological education.

**A Bequest:** The Cluster has now reached a level of maturity that one of its founders, Dr. Dorothy Marple, has left a substantial estate to support the teaching of courses in ecumenism at each seminary. The Cluster rejoices in Dr. Marple’s vision and commitment to resourcing theological education.

**Some Highlights:** For the Cluster and Southern Seminary the past year has been one of solidifying the **LTSS/Lenoir Rhyne** merger, with the seminary now on a sustainable trajectory. President Wayne Powell of Lenoir Rhyne University attends Eastern Cluster Board meetings with Dr. Clay Schmit, the Provost of LTSS, demonstrating Lenoir Rhyne’s support for the Cluster. **The Civil War Museum** at LTSG has been nominated for two prestigious international museum awards. **LTSP** is celebrating its 150th Anniversary on October 16, 2014 and Bishop Elizabeth Eaton will be the keynote speaker. The boards of LTSG and LTSP have been meeting to discern how the two schools can best be good stewards of the resources for theological education in the northeast. There is already one internship and CPE program, as well as expanded faculty sharing between the two schools.

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