

2017 Report of the Eastern Cluster of Lutheran Seminaries to the Synods of Regions 7, 8 and 9

In the rapidly changing landscape of theological education, “status quo” has less and less meaning. Instead, we might talk about a “fluxus quo,” as change and flux seem to be the “new normal.” The Eastern Cluster of Lutheran Seminaries is no exception.

For those less familiar with the Eastern Cluster, this was the separately incorporated entity created by Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, and the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia to create efficiencies by inviting shared use of resources and greater interaction between the faculty and staff of our institutions. Since its founding in 1995, the Eastern Cluster has fostered strong collaboration between the three eastern schools and other partners, enhancing our common task of theological education for a broad spectrum of students and lifelong learners.

Across its history, the Cluster has successfully received grants from a number of foundations – Lilly Endowment, Luce Foundation, Teagle Foundation, Thrivent – as well as ELCA research and development grants made available by the Division for Ministry. Over the course of its life, in excess of \$6 million has been garnered for Clusterwide projects. Among other projects, the creation of One Library Under Three Roofs (linking the three campus libraries into a unified system), Project Connect (a vocational discernment and recruitment effort), and various attempts to build a robust coordinated Cluster program of continuing education received the largest grants, and probably had the greatest impact. Most recently, the Cluster has received a renewal and extension of the Lilly-Endowment funded Abundant Life grant to help reduce student debt, teach greater financial acumen among our students, and promote holistic stewardship in the personal lives and congregations of our graduates.

Other major emphases and programs include Cluster sponsorship of the annual Diaconal Ministry Formation Event (with faculty from the three schools contributing), significant Cluster budgetary support for the Atlanta program (an Afro-centric studies project in collaboration with the Interdenominational Theological Center), and a collaborative Doctor of Ministry program centered at Philadelphia. Most recently, the schools have worked with colleagues from the ELCA on carrying out a consultation on the Cluster archives, and an upcoming LWF trip to Namibia supported in part through funds designated for use in the Cluster (the Marple Fund).

In recent years, there have been a number of changes to the Cluster. In 2009, the Cluster was “downsized” to reduce administrative costs. In 2012, it adapted to the incorporation of Lutheran Southern Seminary into Lenoir-Rhyne University. And today it is responding to the unification of LTSG and LTSP into United Lutheran Seminary. Despite these changes, the goals of the Cluster – to foster shared resources and encourage collaboration in order to enhance and broaden theological education – remain the same, even as the form of that cooperation continues to evolve. Currently, the governing board is considering whether the administrative structure of the Cluster is a help or hindrance to continue our shared library system, support our faculty fellows, facilitate the opportunity to seek impactful grants, and increase the potential to create cooperative systems of education for the larger church. As we explore various possibilities for faithful and efficient sharing of resources, we are grateful for the encouragement, prayers, and support of our synods and larger church. Theological education for the whole church has never been more important, and the Eastern Cluster of Lutheran Seminaries has been privileged to support that endeavor.

David J. Lose, Executive Director

William B. Trexler, Board Chair