

## **2018 Report of the Eastern Cluster of Lutheran Seminaries to the Synods of Regions 7, 8 and 9**

Last year, my predecessor, David Lose, spoke about the rapidly changing landscape of theological education and said that we might talk about a “fluxus quo.” The past two years have done nothing to suggest that Dr. Lose was mistaken in his assessment at least with respect to the Eastern Cluster of Lutheran Seminaries.

The Eastern Cluster is the separately incorporated entity created by Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary (LTSS), the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg (LTSG), and the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia (LTSP) 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.

None of those original seminaries are the same. LTSS merged with Lenoir-Rhyne University, and LTSG and LTSP have merged with one another to become United Lutheran Seminary with two campuses. The leadership of the now two seminaries of the Eastern Cluster has changed in that time. President Cooper-White (LTSG) retired and President Lose (LTSP) answered a call to return to parish ministry. Moreover the leadership of Lenoir-Rhyne University and LTSS has changed as well with Dr. Fred Whitt becoming president and Dr. David Ratke becoming dean of the seminary.

Over the course of its history, the Cluster has received grants from a number of foundations – Lilly Endowment, Luce Foundation, Teagle Foundation, Thrivent – as well as ELCA research and development grants. Over the course of its life, in excess of \$6 million has been received. Among other projects, the creation of One Library Under Three Roofs (linking the 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 a Lilly Endowment Fund grant (Abundant Life grant) to help reduce student debt, teach financial literacy among our students, and promote holistic stewardship in the personal lives and congregations of our graduates.

Despite recent changes in the member seminaries, 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. 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 C. Ratke, Executive Director

William B. Trexler, Board Chair

