The Lilly Projects
at theological seminary
The mission of Lexington Theological Seminary is to prepare faithful leaders for the church of Jesus Christ and, thus, to strengthen the church’s participation in God’s mission for the world. This core expression of the Seminary’s mission to educate and train clergy and lay leaders is anchored in the premise that people are called to the vocation of ministry by God and they accomplish their purposes in ministry in partnership with the church. Lexington Theological Seminary lives out this belief in its strategic imperative to sustain pastors in ministry. We understand that preparation for pastoral ministry entails rigorous education, caring mentors, substantive peer relations, and a deep understanding of congregational life. We also understand that skills, habits, and practices that sustain pastors in congregational ministry develop over a lifetime of ministry in collaboration with communities of faith.

Through the generosity of Lilly Endowment Inc. and their grant-funded initiatives, Conversations on Stewardship & Finances, Thriving in Ministry, and Thriving Congregations, LTS has been able to implement significant programs that will impact the church for years to come. Participation in these initiatives since 2014 has allowed LTS to support student financial well-being; expand the understanding of structural economic challenges faced by clergy and congregations; conduct research related to bi-vocational ministry; and help clergy and congregations delve more deeply into ways they thrive in their respective calls to serve God’s people. The Office of Lilly Projects at Lexington Theological Seminary seeks to provide a set of overarching programs and services that embraces our students, journeys with them as new pastors, and supports well-being in ministry to strengthen clergy, congregations, and communities.

Dr. Charisse L. Gillett serves as President of Lexington Theological Seminary and as Executive Director of the Office of Lilly Projects at Lexington Theological Seminary.
The Conversations on Stewardship & Finances Project at LTS has engaged with partners, students, and congregations to help address increasing economic challenges faced by theological students and ministers. This project is part of the Lilly Endowment-funded Theological Schools Initiative to Address Economic Challenges Facing Future Ministers (ECFFM). At LTS, the project work has sought to strengthen student financial literacy and well-being, improve institutional practices, and research the implications of bi-vocational ministry.

**Conversations with Organizational Leaders**

One of the goals of the Conversations on Stewardship & Finances Project was to influence the larger conversation among undergraduate and graduate theological institutions and other partners of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) regarding financial literacy, student debt, and the cost of higher education.

**Strategies**

LTS partnered with the Council of Colleges and Universities of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and Phillips Theological Seminary to convene a working group of presidents, administrators, and faculty to explore the challenges of financing a college education and a graduate theological education for students interested in ministry.

**Activities**

The conversation group, The Presidential Round Table, met to focus on strategic issues that impact and influence decisions related to college financing. Research also was conducted concerning the challenges of student debt within undergraduate schools and graduate theological institutions related to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Recommendations emerged from the conversations as possibilities for further partnership and strategies to address complex problems. They were shared with the appropriate governing boards of each partner and with the Council of Theological Education and Higher Education Leadership Ministries, as well as at regional and general assemblies of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).
Conversations with Students
Another goal of the Conversations on Stewardship & Finances Project was to enhance and enrich efforts to educate LTS students about biblical stewardship, financial literacy, and the implications of consumer and student loan debt on ministry.

Strategies
LTS built upon existing practices in student services and its academic program to support enhanced knowledge for staff, strengthen conversations held with students, and improve resources used with students.

Activities
Financial planning resources were made available on the LTS website to help students make well-informed financial decisions as they pursue theological education and prepare for ministry after seminary. These resources support counseling the Director of Financial Aid conducts with students about stewardship and financial planning.

Conversations with Congregations and Pastors
The Conversations on Stewardship & Finances Project sought to conduct research to understand the implications of bi-vocational ministry on the choices and financial viability of clergy and congregations.

Strategies
LTS partnered with the Christian Church In Kentucky to identify congregations and clergy with the most potential to benefit from participation in the project. The research project involved an online survey fielded with Disciples of Christ clergy in Kentucky and semi-structured interviews with bi-vocational solo pastors and lay leaders of the congregations they serve. The results of the survey and interviews were analyzed and shared within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).
The *Thriving in Ministry* Project at Lexington Theological Seminary seeks to help pastoral leaders thrive in congregational leadership and to enhance the vitality of the congregations they serve. Beginning in 2019, this five-year project supports ministers who are in relationship with LTS by providing peer groups, mentors, and educational resources to strengthen their role as pastoral leaders.

One focus of the *Thriving in Ministry* Project is the well-being of graduates in the first years of ministry beyond seminary. Through clergy peer groups and strengthened mentoring opportunities, LTS aims to support graduates in years one through five of congregational ministry.

A second focus of the *Thriving in Ministry* Project is research related to the experience of ministers who identify themselves as bi-vocational. This aspect of the project builds upon research concerning bi-vocational ministry LTS has been conducting since 2014. Through assembling a bi-vocational research and writing team, designing and implementing a research study, and convening the Institute for Bi-Vocational Ministry, LTS seeks to support bi-vocational ministers and to gain a richer understanding of this work and the people who undertake it.

**Thrive Peer Groups**

In years one, two, and three of the *Thriving in Ministry* Project, LTS invites graduates involved in congregational ministry to participate in Thrive Peer Groups. The Thrive experience includes:

- Convening LTS graduates in a multi-year peer community using a cohort model;
- Learning from experienced ministers through visits to their ministry sites; and
- Embracing congregations as full partners in the conversation on clergy well-being and congregational vitality through opportunities for leadership development and lifelong learning.

Involvement in Thrive groups aims to support graduates through mutually supportive relationships with ministry colleagues that strengthen their sense of pastoral identity and smooth their transition from seminarians to pastoral leaders. Thrive groups are enriched through learning from experienced pastors and partnerships with congregations.

Rev. Katherine Alexander, Advancement Associate, coordinates the THRIVE Clergy Program.

**Pathways Mentoring Program**

The Pathways program includes:

- Supporting quarterly meetings of graduates and mentors through face-to-face meetings and distance technology;
- Developing a mentor database and identifying resources to support effective mentoring; and
- Hosting conferences for members of the LTS community that focus on the value and purpose of mentoring relationships as well as providing support for effective mentoring.

These programs reflect research on pastoral excellence and well-being affirming the value of mentoring relationships.

Rev. Jan Ehrmantraut, Coordinator of the Mentoring Program/Chaplain, coordinates the Pathways Mentoring Program.
Perspectives of Bi-Vocational Ministry

Research Study
In this area of the Thriving in Ministry Project, LTS is designing and implementing a research study that seeks to learn more about the experiences of bi-vocational ministers and the congregations they serve. This research builds upon bi-vocational ministry research conducted by LTS as part of its Conversations on Stewardship & Finances Project. In the Thriving in Ministry project, the research focuses on the experiences of bi-vocational ministers in contexts where bi-vocational ministry has been a traditional practice, such as in rural communities and in Latinx and African-American contexts. The study involves:

» Assembling a research and writing team – This group of leaders meets regularly to guide the research and to write about various dimensions of bi-vocational ministry;
» Designing and implementing a research study focused on learning more about effective bi-vocational ministry;
» Structuring educational opportunities for bi-vocational ministers, conducting interviews, and fielding surveys; and
» Analyzing and interpreting the research findings and preparing a rich report of what has been learned.

Institute for Bi-Vocational Ministry
Within the Thriving in Ministry Project, LTS is hosting the Institute for Bi-Vocational Ministry to provide opportunities for personal and educational growth as well as reflective conversations for bi-vocational ministers. The Institute offers: programs of academic and continuing education courses, annual conferences, and clergy mentoring circles during the tenure of the project. LTS faculty and guests are teachers and leaders for the Institute for Bi-Vocational Ministry.
THRIVING CONGREGATIONS

Introduction

The overarching purpose of the Thriving Congregations Initiative is to strengthen and learn from congregations in order to further solidify the relationship between congregations and LTS. The Thriving Congregations grant seeks to expand the relationship by answering the question, “How can we create opportunities that lead to thriving congregations so they in turn become sites from which others, particularly pastors, lay leaders, and students, can learn with and from congregations?”

1. Congregations will obtain a clearer understanding of how they view their identity and thus articulate a clearer sense of their mission.
2. Congregations will obtain a clearer understanding of the role of the pastor in the development and sustenance of a congregation’s mission.
3. Congregations will obtain a deeper appreciation for the role of an empowered laity in the development of the identity, vision, and mission of a congregation for greater ecclesial effectiveness in their faith communities.
4. Congregations will develop an understanding of how to measure progress for greater ecclesial effectiveness in their faith communities.

Learning Communities

Congregations have been selected from Arizona, Florida, Iowa, and Kentucky to participate in learning communities for the first four years of the project. Twenty-three (23) congregations are participating and will be placed in groups of three or four for their learning communities; these learning communities will serve as small-group cohorts for the duration of the project. LTS has invited African-American, Latinx, and bi-vocational congregations to participate in order to further the ongoing work and research of the Office of Lilly Projects.
2020-2024

Activities

» Annual gatherings in Lexington (2020 via Zoom) for a conference surrounding the year’s objective.

» Quarterly meetings of the Learning Community with the Project Director to discuss progress and evaluate further needs.

» Annual reading project within the congregation’s leadership team.

» Annual visit with each congregation from the Project Director. When possible, these will be in person visits.

Intended Outcomes

The primary outcome is for congregations to become stronger, more vital congregations within their own context. Another important outcome is an enhanced protocol for the Accountable Ministry Site program at LTS. In conversation with these 23 congregations, LTS will analyze the workings of these congregations and use what we learn to improve curricular and programmatic offerings that support the learning and life of a congregation. Finally, this process will better prepare students for a life in ministry.
Lexington Theological Seminary strives to live out its mission to prepare faithful leaders for the church of Jesus Christ by adhering to these strategic imperatives. The Office of Lilly Projects serves to sustain pastors in ministry and to promote academic excellence and relevance.
The mission of Lexington Theological Seminary is to prepare faithful leaders for the church of Jesus Christ and, thus, to strengthen the church’s participation in God’s mission for the world.

Lexington Theological Seminary seeks to be a servant of the church preparing people for ministry in congregations through innovative instruction, flexible curriculum, congregational experience and compassionate engagement with the needs of society. The Seminary offers an online program that is competency-based, congregation-centered, and developmental in its commitment to prepare people for leadership in congregational ministry.

As an integral part of the church, the seminary serves the church as a theological resource and as a center of continuing education for clergy and lay leaders.

Lexington offers programs for Master and Doctoral students, as well as Certificates and Continuing Education opportunities. For program details, visit www.lextheo.edu or contact the Office of Admissions at (866) 296-6087.
Lilly Endowment Inc. is a private philanthropic foundation created in 1937 by J.K. Lilly Sr. and sons Eli and J.K. Jr. through gifts of stock in their pharmaceutical business, Eli Lilly and Company. While those gifts remain the financial bedrock of the Endowment, the Endowment is a separate entity from the company, with a distinct governing board, staff and location. In keeping with the founders’ wishes, the Endowment supports the causes of community development, education and religion and maintains a special commitment to its hometown, Indianapolis, and home state, Indiana.

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