



news from the Eastern Cluster of Lutheran Seminaries

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LILLY ENDOWMENT EXTENDS GRANT TO EASTERN CLUSTER OF LUTHERAN SEMINARIES FOR PROJECT CONNECT INITIATIVE

(Gettysburg, PA) The Eastern Cluster of Lutheran Seminaries (cluster) has been awarded a \$1.5 million grant by the Indianapolis-based Lilly Endowment Inc. to extend its 2005 initiative called "Project Connect," which is strengthening the network of congregations, institutions, and agencies that encourage those who will become the next generation of church leaders.

The grant will help the cooperative cluster of three Lutheran seminaries -- the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg (Gettysburg), The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia (Philadelphia), and Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary (Southern) -- deepen and extend programs and partnerships designed to increase the number of persons preparing for a vocation in the church. The Rev. Marcus Miller, president of the Southern Seminary, and executive director of the cluster, said, "This generous \$1.5 million grant allows the three Seminaries of the Eastern Cluster to deepen connections to discernment partners and to continue this fruitful work of raising up leaders for the church. We are very grateful to Lilly Endowment for their honest feedback and support."

The three seminaries are affiliated with the 4.8 million member Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). The cluster received a start up grant of \$3 million in 2005 from the Endowment, when it appointed Mr. Donald G. Johnson of Freedom, NH as its first executive director. Johnson, who came to Project Connect with more than three decades of experience as a director of outdoor ministry at New England's Camp Calumet, is a rostered leader of the ELCA, serving as an Associate in Ministry.

Johnson described the program's next phase as a focus "to help move this initiative toward long-term sustainability. The focus of Project Connect will continue to be young adults (ages 18-30) and we will continue to work together to identify young adults who have gifts for public ministry, provide opportunities for theologically sound vocational discernment, and, for those who are sensing call to public ministry, encourage and sustain them as they continue on their discernment journeys. A major change in this next phase will be to switch from a central, administratively driven initiative to having the energy for the initiative generated by a widespread, grassroots involvement of the vast network of leaders throughout ELCA Regions 7, 8, and 9. This is what one program director at the Endowment refers to as 'initiative inversion'. One of the central components of Project Connect during the next few years will be the development of 'Network Initiative Grants'."

In this second phase of Project Connect, according to Johnson, "Grants will be provided to synods to implement strategies they develop for strengthening the 'culture of call' throughout synods in Regions 7, 8, and 9. In this way, there will be local versions of the Project Connect endeavor operating in different synods, rather than one version operating throughout all three regions as has been the case in the first grant."

The seminary cluster project, entitled “Connect: Calling Leaders for a Changing World” is designed to help the church address a growing rate of pastoral vacancies in the ELCA, and to enlist the church’s leaders and ministries to fulfill their task of helping young adults discern a call to ministry.

Together the Eastern Cluster of Lutheran Seminaries enroll approximately 800 students in theological degree programs. Currently, Vocation and Education staff of the ELCA project an unprecedented need for more pastors and rostered leaders over the next decade, increasing the expectations for the number of future graduates from its eight seminaries. Project Connect and the Eastern Cluster have developed an expansive network of colleges, outdoor ministry centers, campus ministries, Lutheran Volunteer Corps and other agencies, synods, congregations, and pastors to plan a comprehensive program of vocational discernment and seminary recruitment directed at college-aged students.

More information about “Project Connect: Calling Leaders for a Changing World” can be found on the web site www.projectconnect.org.

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More information and other news releases are available at the Eastern Cluster of Lutheran Seminaries’ web site: www.easterncluster.org or via email: info@lts.edu, or by calling (717) 334-6286 ext. 3001