



### *Theological School Initiative to Address Economic Issues Facing Future Ministers*

In 2013 and 2014, Lilly Endowment, Inc., awarded grants of up to \$250,000 to 67 schools of theology across the nation as part of the *Theological School Initiative to Address Economic Issues Facing Future Ministers*. This Lilly initiative, which is administered in cooperation with the Association of Theological Schools' *Economic Challenges Facing Future Ministers* (ECFFM) program, made awards to seven United Methodist schools of theology: Boston University School of Theology, Candler School of Theology (at Emory University), Duke University Divinity School, Iliff School of Theology, Perkins School of Theology (at Southern Methodist University), United Theological Seminary, and Wesley Theological Seminary.

The Lilly-funded seminaries approached implementation of the initiative differently. Some seminaries integrated new course offerings in the MDiv curriculum, and some expanded existing orientation or counseling components of the financial aid staff's duties, while others brought in consultants for individual counseling. Each institution is learning and receiving feedback from students. This project has not run through the full cycle of a student's average three-year residency in a seminary, so any impact on seminarian debt has not been fully evaluated; however, the Lilly initiative has motivated seminaries to focus on equipping students to make better financial choices and manage educational debt and other expenses, in a healthy, effective manner.

The following is a summary of how each of the seven Lilly-awarded United Methodist schools of theology are uniquely implementing the grants.

#### **Boston University School of Theology**

Boston University School of Theology has responded to the economic challenges facing seminarians by developing the STEWARD program, or "Stewardship Thinking, Economic Wellbeing, and Reduction of Debt." The STEWARD program combines curricular, extracurricular, and financial innovation to prepare students and local religious leaders for wise financial

management in their personal and professional lives, framed in a theology of stewardship. The program goal is to enhance personal and institutional stewardship, to guide students and other participants in wise financial planning, and to support vocational planning for post-seminary years through research, financial literacy workshops, mentoring, experimentation, and resource development.

Boston University School of Theology used the Lilly funding in a purposeful, holistic fashion. Orientation now includes a one hour video and presentation from the Director of Financial Aid. In addition, a one credit hour course is offered to first-year students with three class sessions on personal financial and three courses on institutional/ ecclesial finance also featuring a faculty panel on the broader themes of stewardship. Students also can participate in one-on-one meetings with a financial mentor/expert to review their personal financial challenges, goals, and strategies.

The school aims to offer a holistic approach that will help the students mind, body, and soul while impacting critical awareness and practical financial knowledge regarding student loan indebtedness as it relates to future expected salary and earning potential, cost-of-living and geographic location, and strategies for student loan repayment.

#### **Candler School of Theology (at Emory University)**

The Faith and Finance program is led by Candler School of Theology faculty in consultation with financial planning professionals, who meet with students face-to-face at various points in the program. The program is integrated into the MDiv curriculum through First-Year Advising Group, Second Year Con Ed Reflection Group, and Final Year Advising. Additionally, Candler Financial Aid staff meets with every first-year seminarian as a requirement of this program and provides students with a budget template. Meeting for about a half hour with each student, they discuss the student's personal three-year plan for financing seminary.

The faculty has created a course entitled "Living Lean in Atlanta" to assist the students to live cheaply while in



seminary. The program also includes a collection of online resources—video podcasts, study guides, and other tools—designed to help navigate issues of financial responsibility.

The Lilly Endowment and the Association of Theological Schools has encouraged other schools of theology to review the video produced by Candler on the realities of seminarian personal finances and educational debt to help initiate the conversation among their institutions and denominations. The first video (in a series of three to be produced) can be found here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sz1U69TYUhU>.

### **Duke University Divinity School**

The Duke Divinity School has established a Clergy Indebtedness Task Force comprised of students, administrators, and faculty that meets regularly. The task force initiated a series of student-led gatherings that included table and panel conversations around debt management, Christian financial practices, and local seminarian cost of living saving opportunities. Duke's Lilly project includes four strategies:

1. A research project studying the distribution of scholarships and financial investments in field education to measure the correlation between students' funded field education opportunities and their level of indebtedness upon graduation.
2. An intentional multi-pronged approach to increase student financial literacy through the Mentoring for Ministry program and personal financial interviews.
3. Extending the reach and partnership with participating congregations of the "Celebrating God's Call" scholarship program to include all MDiv students in this program by raising the matching funds to a \$1,000:\$1,000 match for the first 40 churches that commit to offer scholarship support for a student.
4. The creation of a program called the "No Debt Challenge," through which students are encouraged to graduate debt-free. Any student

who has not received a merit-based scholarship from Duke Divinity School and who has shown initiative in applying for external scholarship assistance, is eligible to apply for and receive this transition into ministry grant.

### **Illiff School of Theology**

Illiff School of Theology has created a program entitled "Spiritually Integrated Financial Resiliency" (SIFR) with its grant from the Lilly Endowment. MDiv students are selected to be in a cohort group that will create a community of accountability and learning. SIFR scholars are required to complete four specific courses during their first year in the program. All courses are also available to students in the broader Illiff degree programs.

The first course, "Self Care: Theological and Psychological Perspectives," assists in teaching spiritual practices that foster self-compassion and move students from fear or shame based lived theologies of stress. The second course, "Spiritual Framework for Fundraising," equips students with practical, theologically grounded skills related to fundraising and philanthropy in faith communities and non-profits. The third course, "Financial Management," examines financial concepts for leaders that introduces students to budget development, financial forecasting, and debt management. The fourth course, "Authentic Engagement," wraps up the final financial and debt components while focusing on the Self, the Whole, and the Other. The final course offers students an opportunity to examine the theological and psychosocial foundations of authentic leadership, individually and collectively.

Participants in the SIFR initiative are required to take a survey periodically during the course to track trends, reflect on changes in knowledge and awareness, and highlight values, beliefs, and feelings as they emerge within the context of the project. A modified version of this assessment will also be used with students not involved in the SIFR program, trustees, faculty, staff, and denominational partners in order to assess change across the institution.



Liff's goal with this initiative is to improve the financial well-being of those who intend to enter into ministry.

### **Perkins School of Theology (at Southern Methodist University)**

Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University applied the Lilly grant to address a broader seminary concern for the economic and time pressures increasingly faced by students. In this context, three major modifications have been to streamline students' paths to graduation from Perkins:

1. A two-year Master of Arts in Ministry degree for deacons and specialized ministry was established, in contrast to the three-year Masters of Divinity degree, to assist in reducing costs.
2. The MDiv internship component was streamlined by reducing the number of required hours for internship and taking out policy prohibiting classroom coursework or outside employment during full time internship.
3. The required number of MDiv credit hours was reduced from 85 to 73 to decrease total expenses.

Perkins also began a study of job surveys for recent graduates, researching entrepreneurial options for debt repayment, and forming a plan on increasing financial literacy for seminarians. A pilot workshop on financial aid literacy will be offered in Fall 2015.

Perkins' goal is to initiate a schoolwide effort to streamline degree programs, reduce cost, provide financial literacy, and increase enrollment, so that well trained students will lead healthy churches.

### **United Theological Seminary**

United's Lilly Endowment project focuses on financial literacy and education directly through the financial aid process for seminarians. Some institutional changes in financial aid processing have been

- Packaging for direct costs verses cost of attendance;

- Reducing loans requested by including scholarships in award packaging;
- Revising cash advance policies;
- Pre-admission and exit notifications that include transparent realities of total debt borrowed and loan payment expected for the student; and
- Offering counseling help from the financial aid office.

United also has created an Ambassador Mentor program for first-year graduate or doctoral level students where the mentors will be trained specifically in financial matters. Campus workshops and online financial literacy courses are being offered to assist students.

United's primary goal is for students/alumni to improve their long-term debt realities by reducing the overall amount borrowed for seminary education. The second goal is to change student attitudes and behaviors toward money and financial literacy.

### **Wesley Theological Seminary**

Wesley School of Theology has focused its Lilly Endowment initiatives in a three-prong approach:

1. Gathering research from graduate and student cohort groups to study implications and differences to determine future institutional practices for the school and students.
2. Developed a high quality class on financial literacy for future clergy that includes theology, stewardship, practical, and personal finance taught by an advisory group of financial experts in the DC area. A next step is to make some of these resources available online to Wesley students and alumni and the wider church connection.
3. Maintain relationships with UMC annual conferences for continued conversation on identifying and solving the problem by participating and implementing change together. Wesley convened a meeting with four annual



conferences (Baltimore-Washington, Peninsula Delaware, Susquehanna, and Virginia) for common conversation around economic realities facing clergy specifically around educational debt.

Wesley's goals are to invest in the course to make it sustainable and offered to a broader audience, assess the research, and be part of the conversation in systematic changes needed to address the issue.

### **Association of Theological Schools Summary**

The Association of Theological Schools summarized the overall themes that emerged in the first year from the 67 institutions involved in the Economic Challenges Facing Future Ministers initiative. That article can be found here:

<http://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentations/documents/67-theological-schools-share-strategies.pdf>