

# **Lexington Theological Seminary**

## **Conversations on Stewardship & Finances**

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Lexington Theological Seminary's "Conversations on Stewardship & Finances" project engages with partners, students, and congregations to help address the increasing economic challenges facing future ministers. Over the course of three years the project seeks to increase financial literacy, improve institutional practices, and research the implications of bi-vocational ministry for clergy and congregations. "Conversations on Stewardship & Finances" is guided by three goals; the first two goals focus on financial literacy and institutional practices, while the third goal focuses on a research project with bi-vocational ministers in Kentucky.

Our first goal is to influence the larger conversation between undergraduate and graduate theological institutions regarding financial literacy, student debt, and the cost of higher education. To accomplish this, LTS is partnering 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. This group has held its initial meeting and we are preparing for our second conversation.

Our second goal is to enhance and enrich efforts to educate Lexington Theological Seminary students about biblical stewardship and the implications of consumer and student loan debt on their ministries. In order to accomplish this, LTS is building upon existing practices in student services and the academic program by supporting enhanced knowledge for staff and strengthening the conversations and documents used with students. At this point the project director and the LTS director of financial aid are becoming familiarized with the content of what current students are learning by auditing LM 560 "Resources for Mission: Understanding Stewardship as a Spiritual Discipline," a course currently required for all M.Div. students at LTS.

Our third goal involves conducting research to understand the implications of bi-vocational ministry on the choices and financial viability of clergy and congregations. LTS is partnering with the Christian Church In Kentucky (Disciples of Christ) in identifying congregations and clergy with the most potential to benefit from participation in the project. We have met with CCIK staff and have begun the process of establishing an advisory team for the research.

As we begin our work, we are finding much interest and enthusiasm among conversation participants. In connection with all three goals of our project, individuals are expressing concern about the economic challenges facing those who are studying to become ministers as well as those serving in ministry. We have developed a communication piece for the project to use with the various communities with which we are working. Resources we are collecting for use in our Conversations with Organization Leaders (Goal I) include, "The Gathering Storm: The Educational Debt of Theological Students" (Auburn Theological Seminary, 2005), "Trends in Student Aid 2012" (College Board Advocacy & Policy Center), "Student Debt & the Class of 2011" (The Institute for College Access & Success), and "Student Debt: Myths and Facts – September 2012" (The Council of Independent Colleges).

The "Conversations on Stewardship & Finances" project at L.T.S. is directed by Rev. Kris Bentley.

230 Lexington Green Circle

Lexington, KY 40503

Office 859.280.1210; Cell 859.421.5672; Fax 859.281.6042

Email: [Kris.Bentley@lextheo.edu](mailto:Kris.Bentley@lextheo.edu)