

## SECTION 3

# THE LILLY ENDOWMENT'S PATHWAYS FOR TOMORROW INITIATIVE: PEEKING AROUND THE NEXT BEND

### *Introduction*

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Lilly Endowment has invested heavily in theological education and ministry for many years. Through its dedication, many schools have been challenged to consider, among other things, vocational discernment, how one thrives in ministry, and pathways for future ministry leaders. Last year *Reflective Practice* offered a quick summary of three different projects that had received funding from the Lilly Endowment's Pathways for Tomorrow Initiative. There are hundreds of schools that have received this funding. These three schools were highlighted because of their focus on creative adaptations in theological field education. Steven Chambers at Vancouver School of Theology, Daniel Poole at Bethany Theological Seminary, and Fr. Andrew Turner at St. Mary's Seminary each shared a short summary of their dreaming when they applied for their grants. It's now one year later, and those dreams are beginning to take shape. Conferences have been implemented, structures are shifting, programs have been developed. A lot can happen in just a year! These are five-year grants, so not every step has been taken, but the articles in this section share insights from the pathways they are building and offer a glimpse around the next bend.

Common threads surface in their work that are worth noting for our own exploration of how we shape and adapt our own field education programs. Each school takes on the particularities of its own denomination's or school's traditions or tenets. Yet, even as they build pathways that are specific responses to the signs of the times in their context, they are building pathways with insights for any of us. Each program is student centered. Vancouver School of Theology undertook extensive evaluative interviews with the students in order to make sure their voice would be heard and integrated in any steps taken. Bethany Theological Seminary embarked on

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creative development of BOLD, “a student-centered program of leadership development.” And St. Mary’s Seminary in Cleveland took a deep dive into the student outcomes the people of God need in line with the “Vocational Synthesis Stage” of the new Program for Priestly Formation.

Another common thread is the collaborative effort at the heart of these programs. Field education is a collaborative educational pedagogy. Collaboration happens between faculty and students, sites, and communities. Here, each of these schools built their Lilly Pathways grants with collaboration in mind. Vancouver School of Theology has built their whole program around an “ecology of partnership” which situates the students in a key ecology of various partners all learning and building a vision of community and education together. This type of collaboration included a two-day retreat for community supervisors to build partnerships and enthusiasm for new and creative ways of educating students. They also set out to collaborate in ways to integrate field education into the whole curriculum.

Bethany Theological Seminary focused on collaboration within the school and among their faculty as well. With a series of faculty colloquy conversations on embracing diversity and facing division, they were able to engage faculty around building this focus into the entire curriculum.

St. Mary’s Seminary tapped collaborative insights from the National Association of Lay Ministry and the Catholic Association of Theological Field Educators, as well as more recently adding collaboration with the Seminary Formation Council. But in addition, their whole focus is helping parishes learn and develop themselves as collaborative parishes so that they are ready to receive students in field placements. A final common thread is the impact of these programs going beyond the usual scope of field education in a seminary context. Each school’s focus invited them to consider the foundational communities they needed to engage in for further impact and education of their students.

At St. Mary’s Seminary, the lens turned slightly to focus on not just individual site supervisors but also on the leadership staff (lay and ordained) who might benefit from resources on collaborative communities. Healthy parish communities offer healthy learning environments, and so they set out to help provide a six-module certification process for collaborative community leadership.

Bethany Theological Seminary chose to have their focus be not only on their students but, in particular, on getting their students and faculty to engage more deeply with underserved populations. Their BOLD program includes reflection, integration, and working directly with particular communities in need.

Finally, Vancouver Theological Seminary, researched student needs in addition to the ecology of partnerships. Aware of the realities of the landscape of the church today and the pressures on students to get out there and fill the gaps left open during the pandemic, they chose to go beyond the usual scope by offering stipend placements that give students breathing room.

Each of these innovative and broad-thinking grants are still unfolding. We can peek around the next bend and see the fruits of their efforts taking shape in healthy communities, curricular changes, and student-focused efforts that take into account the real pressures students are experiencing. Each article in this section offers specific insights which can inspire adaptations and adjustments that might just lead you around the next bend in theological field education.