



## **The Financial Wholeness Project**

Lilly Endowment Grant

**The Theological School Initiative to Address Economic Challenges Facing Future Ministers**

Grant Period: November 1, 2013-December 31, 2016

Grant Amount: \$248,722

The Anderson University School of Theology was selected to receive (along with fifty other Association of Theological Schools' seminaries) a grant from the Lilly Endowment regarding "The Theological School Initiative to Address Economic Challenges Facing Future Ministers."

At the heart of this grant is the Anderson University School of Theology's (AU SOT) mission of biblical reconciliation. The funded grant and its program design seeks to reconcile aspirations of the Church of God (Anderson) and its graduate students related to ministry preparation with the current realities as understood in scholarship support, financial literacy, and seminary program structure. This grant seeks to reconcile these three areas through awareness and education driven by an accurate analysis of the Church of God's scholarship support of students, insights about the behaviors and attitudes of students regarding debt, and the role the AU SOT plays in the life of its sponsoring church. The AU SOT's ultimate goal is to serve as an educator in the "long arc of learning in ministry" for the Church and laity, its future ministry students, and those

already serving in congregations.<sup>1</sup> The Anderson University School of Theology will do this by utilizing resources from the grant to focus on teachable moments concerning financial literacy that will bring long term financial management and personal and economic health across active ministry.

The AU School of Theology has identified several areas of impact on students related to student debt and finances. These are 1) the decreasing scholarship funds from the Church of God (Anderson) supported Blackwelder Tuition Fund; 2) the uncertainty of why students make particular financial choices and how to counsel them related to financial literacy, and; 3) how the School of Theology should be programmatically structured to serve its sponsoring polity.

The seminary has been working over the past decade to change or enhance programs which are believed to impact students economically. The School of Theology has changed its staffing structure, built affordable housing (The York Seminary Village), reduced the number of hours for its Master of Divinity program, initiated a fully online masters degree (the Master of Arts in Christian Ministry is 100% online and one of only six professional ministry masters accredited by ATS), worked to raise endowment funds for scholarships, developed institutional partnerships to address student debt and financial literacy, and collaborated with other church partners to deal with operational systems that affect student debt.

The AU SOT is committed to helping our students live with wholeness of life in how we train them theologically, spiritually and practically. Through this grant, “The Financial Wholeness Project,” the seminary is developing, strengthening, and enhancing its own programs as well as its relationships and partnership within the Church of God and the church at-large. The goals of this grant are 1) to enhance and strengthen the Church of God’s Blackwelder Fund through analysis, partnerships, and education with its sponsoring churches and ministries council. It will also use the research to educate individual donors related to endowed scholarships; 2) to learn through research

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<sup>1</sup> This statement is from the Lilly Endowment in how they understand the path of ministry, from calling to retirement from active ministry and beyond.

the factors that influence student educational and personal debt. The seminary will develop or deliver financial literacy programs at the Anderson University School of Theology, make this program available to undergraduate ministry students, and serve as a resource for those already in ministry through its national ministries council and judicatories, and; 3) to learn through research from its sponsoring church the role the seminary should play in ministry education for the purpose of creating efficient and effective operational structures and degree programs.

The Anderson University School of Theology will ultimately evaluate its success via increases in the Blackwelder Tuition Fund (for Church of God, Anderson, seminarians) and endowed scholarships for all ministry students, reduction of student educational debt prior to seminary and while in seminary, increased student financial literacy, inclusion of financial curriculum in its programming, creation or delivery of degree programs needed by its sponsoring church, and influencing the pastor and congregation conversations concerning ministerial debt and stewardship.

The seminary will share its work in publications (case statements and other literature), conferences, video work, educational materials, and conversations with Church of God constituents and the wider church and academic communities.

We encourage those interested in the AU School of Theology results to visit our website in the future for details of what we are learning and implementing to help with ministerial student debt and education.