

The Lexington Seminar  
FINAL REPORT/PROJECT SUMMARY  
Lancaster Theological Seminary  
May 2006

## **I. Issue and Context**

Lancaster Theological Seminary is a regional ecumenical seminary of the United Church of Christ. As the United Church of Christ began to explore multiple paths toward ordained ministry, including paths that did not involve seminary education, regional Conferences of the UCC requested LTS to support their education of ministers who would not pursue masters-level theological education. Education programs designed for licensed and other lay ministers were already in place in many conferences of the UCC, and Lancaster faculty members had taught in several of these programs on an *ad hoc* basis. Now the conferences were requesting more systematic attention from the Seminary faculty and administration.

At the same time, Lancaster Seminary perceived several stress factors related to this development.

- It was not clear how these multiple paths to ordination might affect seminary enrollment.
- As in many other seminaries, Lancaster's faculty already complains of being too busy. With two relatively new non-degree initiatives implemented – one for clergy and one for youth – Lancaster faculty members were already servicing a variety of Seminary constituencies beyond the classroom.
- Lancaster Seminary perceived a pressing need to cultivate its expanding constituencies both within and beyond the UCC. With financial contributions from local congregations dwindling, and with potential declines in the number of inquiring ministerial candidates, Lancaster was seeking new ways to serve the church and new relationships that would also nourish its future vitality and provide new revenue streams.

Recent re-accreditation reports confirmed what the Lancaster faculty and administration already believed. The Seminary excels at delivering intensive, face-to-face formation for ministry through its three degree programs. Faculty members had not specifically cultivated institutional expertise in educating laypersons and candidates for ministry who either had not completed college or required alternative forms of education.

## **II. Project Design**

Lancaster Seminary determined that the Lexington Seminar process could help the Seminary explore how it could:

- meet the needs of UCC conferences and other regional judicatories for formal education of lay and potentially ordained leaders apart from its degree programs and

- extend its teaching ministry and cultivate broader relationships by developing a major initiative in lay education.

After the summer 2004 Lexington Seminar meetings, Lancaster Seminary developed a five-part plan to assess how it might meet these goals.

First, the Seminary developed an on-campus two-day retreat for UCC conference ministers and national staff in January 2005. The retreat was designed to explore what were the specific educational needs of the conferences, and to plan how and whether Lancaster Seminary might partner with the conferences to develop theological training for persons pursuing ministry via multiple tracks to ordination.

Second, the Seminary envisioned a second, ecumenical retreat with representatives from various regional Protestant denominations.

Third, the Seminary administration would develop an intensive study of existing adult education programs in other denominations.

Fourth, Lancaster decided it could take a leadership role in non-degree theological education by developing a Summer Academy for the summer of 2005. The Summer Academy would serve a dual function. Primarily aimed at enrichment and training for interested lay persons, the Academy also welcomed candidates in non-seminary ordination tracks. Two UCC conferences urged their candidates to participate in Academy courses to meet requirements of their judicatory sponsored education programs.

Fifth, Lancaster determined that it would offer a new program within its standard curriculum of course offerings: a Certificate of Lay Leadership. The Certificate aimed to: introduce the seminary curriculum, faculty and facilities to those who might consider full-time educational opportunities once on campus; secure additional revenues at minimal additional cost to the institution; serve our wider community by increasing the Seminary's visibility, particularly for seekers who might not otherwise feel welcome; and provide additional means to market the seminary's diverse resources.

Together, these processes of discernment, consultation, and initiation of new programs aimed to help Lancaster Seminary determine how it might better serve its diverse constituents while claiming a leadership role in the process of lay education and alternative education for ordination. The primary application of Lexington Seminar funds would be devoted to these two proposed retreats for judicatory leaders and various planning activities.

### **III. Resources Used in Developing and Implementing the Project**

Lancaster Theological Seminary relied heavily upon Bruce Epperly, Director of Continuing Education, for coordination of the retreat for conference ministers and for directing the Summer Lay Academy. The administration secured lay ministry education curricula from a variety of denominations (Episcopal, United Methodist, an assortment of

UCC conference materials, etc.). The Seminary did not bring in outside consultants for this process.

#### **IV. Project Results**

The first major result of Lancaster Seminary's Lexington Seminar project emerged from the January 2005 retreat for UCC conference ministers and national staff. (See dramatic rendering of the retreat, attached in appendix.) While the conference ministers expressed a strong desire to use the Seminary as a resource for their educational programs, they expressed unwillingness to collaborate in new ways across conference boundaries or to allow the Seminary to develop a centralized model for training pastors engaged in the "multiple track" programs. The Seminary realized it could not administer a coordinated program for training ministers successfully, having neither staff nor funding for such an initiative. As a result, the Seminary decided not to pursue a second ecumenical retreat because of the certainty of encountering even more diversity of need and approach to these issues.

The Seminary did follow through with its plans for a 2005 Summer Academy. Over 100 persons participated in the two weeks of the Academy and very positive reviews were received from participant evaluations. The Academy included morning and evening courses on a wide range of topics, daytime workshops and activities, daily worship, and attracted both residential and commuter students. Plans for a 2006 Summer Academy are well underway, with similar attendance numbers expected.

Most participants in the Summer Academy enjoyed their experience. One group, however, clearly struggled with the academic rigor of the program – a group of ministerial candidates in one of the UCC judicatory sponsored programs. Half of these students failed the one course in Church History for which they had registered. This experience and other experiences teaching in lay ministry programs suggests that a "one size fits all" pedagogy will not work, as it fails to recognize the distinctions between people who enter the Academy for personal development and those who are using the Academy as a means of meeting ordination requirements.

In the meantime, Seminary faculty members continue to teach in multiple paths programs through *ad hoc* arrangements. Faculty share significant concerns with such programs; in particular, it is not clear whether conferences have agreed upon appropriate standards and expected outcomes for courses in these programs. When one faculty member pressed a conference to articulate its standards for passing an introductory course, the conference representative related that no such "standards" were in place for the ordination program. The Seminary faculty has determined that "seminary light" programs do not produce the quality or level of preparation of the graduates that the Seminary sends out each year. There is a widely shared perception that those trained in judicatory programs miss significant preparation for the tasks of ministry. On the other hand, students occasionally emerge from these programs and apply to degree programs of the Seminary because they too desire additional education and training.

Lancaster's Certificate program was launched in 2005-06 with insufficient marketing. Only six students initially matriculated into the Certificate program, and one withdrew after taking just one course. More attention will be devoted to this program and again, special courses need to be developed with these particular students in mind.

In short, the major learning outcomes of Lancaster's Lexington Seminar participation include the following.

- Lancaster Seminary is effective at lay education, and its faculty is well-received throughout our region. We do not yet know, however, how well these initiatives will thrive, nor how well they will contribute to the Seminary's financial strength.
- Currently, Lancaster Seminary cannot administer or orchestrate the multiple paths to ordination programs, though faculty may teach in these programs as they see fit.
- Lancaster Seminary continues to discern how many initiatives it can serve well with its resources.

## **V. Sharing the Wisdom**

Lancaster Seminary would like to share some basic findings from its participation in the Lexington Seminar that may be of interest to other institutions.

- We have learned that *in our particular context* "multiple path" (i.e. non-seminary) education programs do not measure up to a seminary education in any significant way. The UCC multiple path initiative honors the denomination's diverse traditions, including Pacific Islander, Native American, and African American churches that have long practiced their own ministerial formation. In our context, however, the multiple paths primarily aims to fill pulpits with part-time, certified, ordained clergy. The various conference programs in our region vary greatly in quality and scope, but no program approaches the level of preparation afforded by a seminary education.
- We have learned that the Lancaster faculty is generally effective at lay education. That is, lay persons appreciate what we offer. At the same time, we have also learned that "one size fits all" offerings – such as lay academy classes intended both to enrich lay persons and to train clergy – diminish our effectiveness. We do not yet know how our lay education initiatives will work out in terms of creating lay leaders who are capable of engaging in revitalization of congregations.
- Lancaster Theological Seminary cannot rely at this point on our denominational judicatories to collaborate on a general approach to non-degree theological education.
- Like many institutions, Lancaster Seminary celebrates its ability to do many things well, but these non-degree initiatives do place significant pressure upon the institution and may deflect it from other dimensions of its mission.

**Lexington Seminar – Final Budget Report**  
**Lancaster Theological Seminary**  
05/30/06

	Expense
1. Administration of project – Dean & Continuing Education	\$1,500.00
2. Lay Leadership Summit (Judicatory & National Staff)	
Lodging	1,155.00
Travel	400.00
Catering	891.50
Resource persons & worship leaders	950.00
Chapel installation	246.39
Materials & supplies	397.96
Facilities	134.50
3. Module training for distance learning component	
Faculty stipends	807.38
Catering	239.63
4. Summer Academies	
Graphic design	400.00
Printing	828.32
Bulk mailing	282.60
5. Two-day faculty retreat (August 2005)	
Catering	185.27
6. Conjoint three-day trustee & faculty retreat (November 2005)	
Lodging	1,711.96
Catering	1,456.00
Supplies	173.22
7. All day faculty retreat (December 2005)	
Catering	179.75
Culminating dinner	3,723.93
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$15,663.41</b>