



# CONVERSATIONS

## *The Lexington Seminar Mentor Project: Preparing Scholars for Leadership*

*By Gretchen E. Ziegenhals*

**H**ow do we call and prepare scholars and teachers for leadership? Four faculty who have participated in The Lexington Seminar were invited to join a program of mentorship centered on the work and calling of academic leadership. Over the past three years, these teachers, along with Seminar staff and guest leaders in theological education, focused on the theological, vocational, and practical under-

standing needed to lead faculties in addressing essential issues of teaching and learning. Joseph Bessler, associate professor of theology at Phillips Theological Seminary; Peter T. Cha, associate professor of pastoral theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; Mary E. Hess, associate professor of educational leadership at Luther Seminary; and Timothy C. Tennent, professor of world missions and

---

*Continued on Page 2*



*Seminar participants Peter Cha of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Joseph Bessler of Phillips Theological Seminary, Mary Hess of Luther Seminary, and Timothy Tennent of Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary are shown with The Rev. Martha Horne (center), former dean and president of Virginia Theological Seminary.*

## “Mentor Project” *cont’d from page 1*

Indian studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary are the participants in the Mentor Project. The four mentor project participants worked alongside the Seminar staff in planning and carrying out the various activities of The Lexington Seminar.

The Seminar, then, was a kind of practice field in which to develop perspectives on theological education that take a broader view than simply the typical academic lenses of faculty. Building on their own skills as teachers, the mentor project participants inquired into the other knowledge and skills required for academic leadership, such as institutional analysis, faculty development, and collaborative learning.

Each year, the mentor project participants met with the Seminar staff in a four-day colloquium that was a more structured inquiry

into the nature and practices of academic leadership. Meeting at the Aspen Wye Conference Center in Maryland, these colloquia reflected the importance of setting and hospitality found in the Summer Seminar. In addition, they provided time for discussions of readings on academic leadership and educational institutions, presentations by the mentor participants and Seminar staff, related films, conversations with invited

academic leaders, worship, and informal conversation.

Each year, the colloquium centered on a different topic. In 2006, the group explored the theme, “The Thicket of Academic Leadership: Cultural and Personal Dynamics.” Guest

speaker John Peter Kenney, academic vice president and professor of religious studies at St. Michael’s College in Burlington, Vermont, shared his perspectives on academic leadership. In 2007, conversation centered



*Joseph Bessler, associate professor of theology at Phillips Theological Seminary, presents his work in the Mentor Project.*

*Continued on Page 3*

## “Mentor Project” *cont’d from page 2*

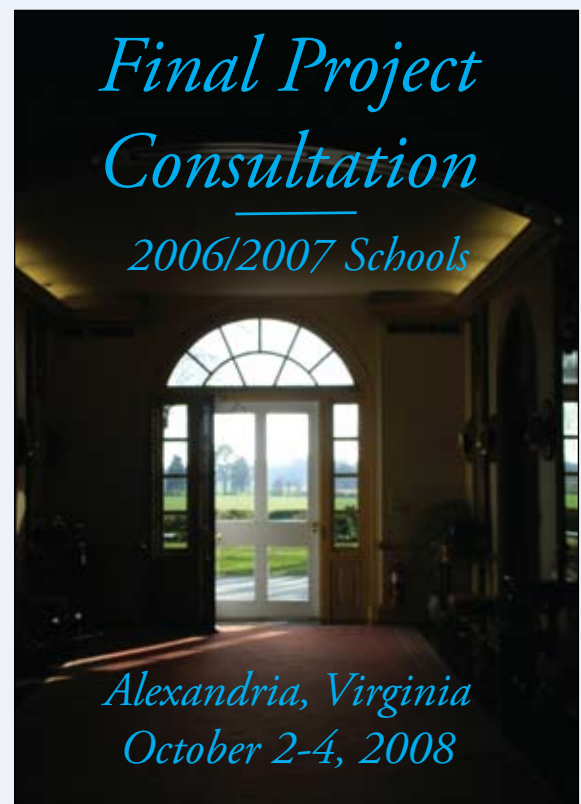


*Seminar participants pause from sessions at the Aspen Wye Conference Center in Maryland with guest presenter Jane Gentry Vance (middle). From left are Peter Cha, Mary Hess, Timothy Tennent, and Joseph Bessler.*

on “Settings and Patterns of Academic Leadership: Structure and Organization.” Leland Eliason, executive vice president and executive director and provost of the Seminary at Bethel Seminary in St. Paul, related his experiences of leadership in theological education. The 2008 colloquium focused on “The Aims and Accountabilities of Academic Leadership: Profession and Vocation.” The Reverend Martha Horne, former dean and president of Virginia Theological Seminary, shared her thoughts and experiences.

Colloquia evenings were enriched by the readings and reflections of Kentucky Poet Laureate Jane Gentry Vance, professor of English at the University of Kentucky, who also teaches in the University’s Honors Program. Vance helped the group think through the power of poetry as the deepest learning about our personal stories and the communities to which we belong.

The four Mentor Projects participants will help provide the leadership for the sessions at the 2008 June Seminar, presenting the work they have developed over the past three years on new models for theological education. Their papers will be published in the forthcoming book, *Revitalizing Practice: Collaborative Models for Theological Faculties*.





## *Five Returning Schools Reflect on Meaning of Seminar Activities*

*By Gretchen E. Ziegenhals*

**F**ive seminaries returned to Northeast Harbor October 11-12, 2007 to reflect with each other and with consultants on the many ways in which they have made meaning out of their Lexington Seminar grant-related activities.

Teams of three faculty and administrators from Bethany Theological Seminary in Richmond, Indiana; Eastern Mennonite Seminary in Harrisonburg, Virginia; Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest in Austin, Texas; Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio; and Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa, presented their grant projects and described

how those activities have affected teaching and learning at their institutions.

Several generative themes emerged from the conversations. First was the theme of institutional identity. Bethany described its



*Brenda Martin Hurst of Eastern Mennonite Seminary*

project as “going back to the future,” asking what the history of the Brethren might mean for the future of the Seminary. Eastern Mennonite reflected on the identity of the Seminary in terms of the Other, of the “art of making whole, which includes holding together competing realities.” ETSS spoke of institutional transformation, of struggle, and of “holding to-

---

*Continued on Page 5*

## *“Reflections” continued from page 4*

gether through difficult times as a faculty, a Seminary, and a Church.” As a part of their grant activities, they retold their collective history, and wrote it down on a scroll. Trinity Lutheran Seminary outlined the competing demands that fragment their identity and sense of vocation and asked, “How do we live effectively within this school and within this culture?” And Wartburg Theological Seminary shared the process of revising their faculty handbook in terms of wrestling with identity issues such as defining “faculty, tenure, or cessation.”

A second theme that prevailed throughout the two-day discussion was the importance of conversation for forming the faculty. Bethany described the evening sessions during their faculty trip to Europe where, despite weary bodies, they spent hours discussing themes central to their message and curriculum. In the process, they developed a more “intentional interaction,” which makes for healthier faculty meetings now. EMS shared how their



*Nathan Frambach of  
Wartburg Theological  
Seminary*

faculty work on the “Other,” has now opened up the opportunity for cultivating an even more hospitable ethos on campus and on-going conversation among faculty about how they will be a semi-



*Jeff Bach of Bethany  
Theological Seminary*

nary. ETSS affirmed their commitment to holding three-hour sessions for difficult conversation in an off-campus setting, and acknowledged that in times of institutional duress, faculty conversation was the “stickum” holding them together. They offer their students a “conversation covenant.” Trinity speaks of conversations in terms of “opening a space” that helps them think through who they are and how they will be Trinity Lutheran. And Wartburg realized that before they could address the student challenges outlined in the narrative, they had to spend time together talking about the things that mattered to them, including the very ways they define themselves.

A third theme that shaped the nature of our time together was the power of story,

---

*Continued on Page 6*

# THE LEXINGTON SEMINAR

*A Project Supported  
by  
Lilly Endowment Inc.  
and Sponsored by  
Lexington Theological  
Seminary*

## *“Reflections” continued from page 5*

beginning with the narratives that each school prepared two years ago. As they reflected on the ways in which the Seminar has impacted their work in teaching and learning, the participants shared stories of their institutional and denominational history, of faculty challenges and successes, of personal and institutional transformation, and of daily life in a theological school. As we tell each other the stories of our lives together, Trinity noted, we reclaim the value of our lives together. Thus participants in the Consultation acknowledged both the generative power for the individual faculty who told stories, but also the ways in which we would continue to make meaning out of the stories as we heard them and carried them home.



## CONVERSATIONS

Newsletter of The Lexington Seminar

Spring 2008

Vol. 10, No. 1

Malcolm L. Warford.....Director  
Gretchen E. Ziegenhals.....Editor

Published by “The Lexington Seminar:  
Theological Teaching for the Church’s  
Ministries.” A Project Supported by Lilly  
Endowment Inc. and Sponsored by Lexing-  
ton Theological Seminary.

631 South Limestone Street  
Lexington, KY 40508  
[www.lexingtonseminar.org](http://www.lexingtonseminar.org)

Presorted Standard  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Lexington, KY  
Permit # 399