

YALE DIVINITY SCHOOL News Release

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Yale Center for Faith & Culture awarded grant to study how pastors learn through practice

New Haven, CT—Lilly Endowment Inc. has awarded a \$1.5 million grant to the Yale Center for Faith & Culture at Yale Divinity School to conduct a five-year research project aimed at determining how pastors, as they practice their profession, develop the complex and distinctive intelligence that leads to excellence in ministry. Participating in the research will be 50 pastors, along with 60 seminary students and their pastoral supervisors, located in five diverse communities throughout the United States.

“The study will both help pastors better understand their own developmental learning in professional practice and strengthen the particular contribution of graduate theological education—in the classroom and in practical field education settings,” said Christian Scharen, who will lead the new study and is director of the Center’s Faith as a Way of Life Program. “It will also highlight the profound roles congregations play in pastors’ learning at various stages in their development.”

Scharen said the initiative, *The Learning Pastoral Imagination Project*, will draw upon and extend a recent Carnegie Foundation study that explored how theological education fosters the development of a pastoral imagination that has the capacity to integrate professional knowledge and skills with moral integrity and religious commitment. The findings of that study were published in the book *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination* (Jossey-Bass, 2006).

According to Scharen, the study could help theological education avoid some of the pitfalls of the past century, when the training of ministers, and other professionals as well, largely emphasized theory over practices and, in so doing, failed “at exactly the point of the integration of knowledge into pastoral practice.”

Over the 2007-2011 project timeline, a series of focal studies will be conducted at the five project locations, involving interviews with the students and their mentors and with pastors at various intervals in years of practice. The hope is that these studies will reveal,

with care and subtlety, the long formation process through which the reflective capacity, perception, and practical skills that lead to “pastoral imagination” develop and advance.

The project will result in publication of scholarly and popular articles, three books, and a website of resources and information for participants and others, such as local churches.

Harold Attridge, dean of Yale Divinity School, said, “Educating effective pastors and religious leaders is central to the mission of YDS. This new grant from the Lilly Endowment will enable Chris Scharen and his colleagues to gain new insight into the ways such effective pastoral leaders are formed in the course of practicing their calling. The study will in turn inform the thinking of theological educators as we adapt our curricula for the twenty-first century.”

Co-directing the project, and acting as senior advisor, will be Miroslav Volf, director of the Yale Center for Faith & Culture and the Henry B. Wright Professor of Theology. Volf will convene and chair a project advisory council.

Lilly Endowment is an Indianapolis-based, private philanthropic foundation created in 1937 by three members of the Lilly family—J.K. Lilly Sr. and sons J.K. Jr. and Eli—through gifts of stock in their pharmaceutical business, Eli Lilly and Company. The Endowment, however, is a separate entity from the company with a distinct governing board, staff and location. It is devoted to the causes of religion, education and community development.

Yale Divinity School, one of the professional schools of Yale University in New Haven, CT, is an interdenominational institution that draws its faculty from the major Christian traditions, with a student body representing more than three-dozen denominations and groups. Instruction is provided in the history, doctrines and polity of all the major church bodies.

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