Covenant Cluster Consultation
16-18 March 2006

More than 60 persons, most of whom are leading lifelong theological education endeavors in the three ELCA Regions in the central United States, gathered March 16-18, 2006. Focused on the theme *Theological Education with all the Baptized: Building the Network*, these persons gathered to reflect on the present and future opportunities for theological education in this portion of the ELCA.

Mark Wilhelm addressed the question "*Where in the world did clusters come from?*" The Covenant Cluster is both a newly-incorporated entity involving Trinity Seminary, Wartburg and Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and also growing identity of the network of theological education providers in Regions 4, 5 and 6. The questions circulating prior to 1988 were "What will we make of theological education in the new Lutheran Church? How many seminaries do we need and where should they be located?" But the commission determined it was time to ask some new questions and act in different ways. And the question became "Are we doing all of the educating we should be doing? If not, how will we muster the resources to do more educating for ministry?" Theological Education was no longer equated with seminary education but became "Educating in theology" or "Educating the people of God in the faith." This education equips all the baptized for their vocations. The assets of the church to accomplish this task extend beyond the seminaries. There was no road map for how to must there assets and resources. The signals were that it was to be done by networking and connections. The seminaries have accomplished the networking between the seminaries in the cluster. The ELCA as a whole has encouraged the development of the network and the institutional collaboration in the service of the mission of the church. The authority has been given to the seminaries to take up strategic planning for theological education in their own territories and ultimately for the whole ELCA, asking "What should the future of theological education look like?" In a prior day, we wouldn't need meetings like this for networking and collaboration because everyone knew each other. Now, since we are no longer an ethnic church, and if we are as serious as we say we are about reaching out to those who have not historically been part of the Lutheran community, building relationships and network will be crucial. Lifelong learning has at times stood in the service of alumnae relations and development of constituencies. Lifelong learning now stands on its own as a part of equipping all of the baptized for God's mission in the world.

Networking can lead us to an endorsement pattern where collectively we recognize our shared ministry, and affirm and admonish each other. Networking rooted in these new relationships can result in our own system of accreditation where we say "This is what you/we should be about." Networking can lead us to an understanding and identification of "Cluster Faculties" who participate in doing all of the teaching and learning that we say we need to do. These are the things that are in the spirit of the Study of Theological Education. These are the things toward which the study pointed us as we muster the resources and assets we have to do the theological teaching and learning for the whole people of God.

David Tiede addressed the question *"Why does the church need the Covenant Cluster?"* Perhaps the question really should be *"Does God need the Covenant Cluster?"* David added to the sense of history as the seminary presidents talked about the three experiments in clustering, each with a north/south orientation that includes each of the ethnic communities to which the

ELCA is reaching. It has also helped all eight of the seminaries see themselves as national seminaries. Our public witness, as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, is being called forth from us. This call is also a transformation for us, specifically breaking the "steel-grip" of the academy which has separated theory from practice in the study of theology. The transformation is reclaiming the misseological aims of theological education and the equipping of people for their vocations of leadership, people equipped to lead in a time of mission. And we don't just need more pastors; we need more leaders of every kind! Then the idea of cluster began to get interesting.

Why does the church need the clusters?

The theological, vocational rationale is the equipping of the congregation. That, finally, is where the body of Christ gathers and from which it is sent. It is not simply the congregation, however, that makes it happen. In each of its manifestations, including the network of theological education, the Body of Christ is present. We can't have leadership education without theological education. It is the Gospel, good news for sinners, which defines the content of theological education. And on its heels is he doctrine of vocation: God doesn't need my good works but my neighbor does. The clusters began to grow up around the shared vocation of speaking good news to sinners and equipping people for their vocations.

The sociological argument is that the churches need the institutions in order to do what we do! We do education, we do social services, we do adoptions, we do nursing homes—and we set up institutions through which we do it. We have to claim the institutions and put them to work. Clustering is the way in which we hold ourselves mutually accountable to whether we are putting the institutions to work on the right things.

How can clustering make it happen?
- The power of shared vision. We can work together to develop a shared vision.
- We can each define our own mission carefully. We can't and don't each need to do everything. Then we begin to understand what we gain from clustering.
- The discipline of results. Referenced *The Nimble Collaboration* from the Wilder Foundation. The results will happen because we have the relationships and the resilience (including resources and governance) that make a collaboration work.

The seminaries are in a key place to shape this cluster. Can we be a cluster bound together by a covenant?

Duane Larson, President of Wartburg Theological Seminary, expressed his concern that this event not become too focused on the seminaries in the Covenant Cluster, but that that it really be an opportunity for visioning and connecting for the sake of the mission of God. The emergence of clustering is filled with opportunity that can't be too closely defined. The strategic ends for theological education are attending to God's mission and the concrete mission of the local congregation. What doe I have in mind?

That we would be about, for the whole church, a good strategic planning process attentive to our own local contexts so that missional leadership would be vitalized in local congregations. Look long term and be very concrete operationally.

Emergence of a communication system that will keep us in touch.

Mark Ramseth, President of Trinity Lutheran Seminary, asked the question "Where am I? Where are we?" His encouragement is for us to take the spiral journey that takes us deep, taking us into assessment of our vocation. The Covenant Cluster is a place where we can safely talk

with each other about the hard questions, but not a place that becomes so safe as to be innocuous. The seminaries are the places authorized, by and with the whole church, for such exploration of vocation. Challenges and random thoughts:

Reclaim the teaching office as a central part of the practice of ministry including endorsing a faculty for the Cluster

Explore our call, our vocation in relation to those who are searching for the deepening faith experience, or seeking religious experience that has nothing to do with the other

What if the Cluster were to develop a curriculum for stewardship

What if the Cluster were to attend to the question of how to pray, how to sustain a devotional life, how to sustain spiritual growth

What if the Covenant Cluster developed distributive learning that maximizes uses of the technology around us.

What if we took this theological education on one person at a time?

"Cluster Dean of Distance Education" was suggested as one of the ways of both communicating about coursework and vetting the cluster faculty.

Assets of the Covenant Cluster
- Kit Kleinhans from Wartburg College talked about the religion program at the college. www.wartburg.edu
- Julie Ryan, The Lutheran School of Theology, www.lstc.edu/lifelong_learn/index.html talked about the degree-free programming at LSTC.
- Don Huber, www.trinitylutheranseminary.edu, presented the opportunities at Trinity Lutheran Seminary
- Kathy Haueisen, The Melanchthon Institute, www.melanchthon-institute.org
- Marcus Pera talked about Lutheran Campus Ministry throughout the regions in the public universities www.elca.org/campusministry
- Shawn Norris talked about campus ministry's resource called Windows of Faith www.elca.org/windowsoffaith and will soon be followed by Windows of Leadership
- Jim Unglaube talked about Carthage College, www.carthage.edu
- Leonard Schulze talked about the Augustine Institute at Carthage, www.carthage.edu/augustine/index.cfm
- Michael Rehak presented the Lay School of Ministry in South-Central Synod of Wisconsin, www.scsw-elca.org/lay_school.htm and the Center for Congregational Leadership
- Gene Bales, Bethany College, presented various programs of Bethany, www.bethanylb.edu
- Eliseo Perez-Alverez, Lutheran Seminary Program of the Southwest, www.lsps.edu
- Kristin Glass, Augustana, Rock Island, talked about the Center for Vocational Reflection www.augustana.edu/vocation
- Connie Leean Seraphin talked about the courses available on The Fisher's Net including "Money Leadership" and "Spirituality" and an audio/video course "Roots of Christian Belief"
- Phyllis Wiederhoeft, talked about the programs and courses offered by the Association of Lutheran Development Executives, www.alde.org

- Tim Fehr, Northwest Synod of Wisconsin, talked about the Lay School of Ministry www.synodresourcecenter.org
- Douglas Liston talked about the *diakonia* program www.thediakoniaprogram.org
- David Echelbarger, director of the Lay School for Mission in the Northern Great Lakes Synod, www.nglsynod.org/lay-school.html
- Jodi Hanson, director of the lay school in the South Dakota Synod, www.augie.edu/related/synod
- Ken Jones talked about the work of Grandview College, www.gvc.edu
- Faith and Wisdom, www.faithandwisdom.org and the downloadable buttons at www.faithandwisdom.org/buttons.html
- Stan Meyer from the Northern Texas Northern Louisiana synod talked about their Parish Lay Ministry program, www.plmacademy.org
- Marianne Wilkinson talked about the Parish Ministry Associates Program in the Central States Synod, www.csspma.org
- Michael Shelley talked about the Doctor of Ministry programs at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, www.lstc.edu/prospect-stud/dmin/index.html
- Bob White presented the programs of Wittenberg University www.wittenberg.edu
- Skip Cornett talked about the lifelong learning programs at Trinity Seminary, www.trinitylutheranseminary.org/ContinuingEd and Select Multimedia Resources, www.elca.org/select
- Danette Johns from the Western Iowa synod talked about Lay School of Ministry www.wisynod.org/layschool/layschool.htm
- Phil Ruge-Jones from Texas Lutheran University talked about the Network of Biblical Storytellers, www.nobs.org and the work that is going on at TLU, www.tlu.edu
- Marilyn Smith talked about the work of the Regional Coordinators in Regions 4, 5 and 6 www.elca.org/synods
- Kay Kinkel from the Southeastern Iowa Synod www.seiasynod.org talked about the variety of programs in the synod
- Darrell Gerrietts from the Northeastern Iowa Synod www.neiasynod.org is beginning its lay school with the launch at the 2006 Synod Assembly.
- Rudy Mueller from the Indiana-Kentucky Synod www.iksynod.org talked about the programming of the synod.
- Tobi Johannsen from the East-Central Synod of Wisconsin www.ecsw.org talked about the Lay School of Ministry, held in two different locations in the synod.
- The Grace Institute for Spiritual Formation is a two year faith formation program http://ministry.luther.edu/grace/
- Greg Kaufmann from the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin talked about the online Synod Resource Center, www.synodresourcecenter.org
- Duane Larson talked about the Theological Education for Emerging Ministries (TEEM) program specifically for the rural context that has been developed at Wartburg Seminary.
- Gloria Doherty talked about the emerging idea of a portal website, referred to by the working titles "Reformation Mall" and "Vocation Portal."

Characteristics of emerging vision
Effective delivery
Networking
Enhanced capacity
Trust
Entrepreneurship
Use of the technologies
Answering the questions "For Whom?"
The humility involved in asking each other for assistance
Development of a mutually affirmed sense of the quality of what we are doing
The ethnic diversity of the geography of the cluster
Establishment of a webpage with links to the various organizations. Reformation Mall?
Building a sense of what others are doing for the sake of those who often can't see much of a broad cross-section of the church.
Broadening of the definition of theological education and who does it.

Where do we go from here?
Who's missing?
Younger adults, Augsburg Fortress Publishers, Parish Pastors, ethnic community, outdoor ministries, Via de Christo, some of the synods are not represented, ecumenical partners,

Need to address the question of "What counts?" when it comes to moving from one program to another. Might we develop some sort of trans-institutional review panel?

Keeping the focus on how we emphasize and energize learning for the whole people of God. The endorsing will likely evolve. For right now, the importance of the meeting has been resource sharing related to the varieties of programs that are in place.

Is it possible to keep a conversation both about endorsement and resourcing going?

What kind of report from this event can go to various organizations including synod councils in Regions 4, 5 and 6?

Can we collaborate to build an inventory of resources and speakers?

There seemed to be interest in this gathering have some kind of lifelong learning function to this gathering.

Bishop Lohrmann wondered about how to really push the impact of this conversation to the congregations and asking congregations what they need from this network.

The question was raised how often a cluster consultation could be held, and whether there should be some kind of break-out groups.

The proposal is to come back to the Marillac Center, March 15-17, 2007.

For the planning committee:
Make sure there are representatives from the other two clusters.
Set up some form of electronic communication that we can use between face-to-face gatherings.
The apparent recommendation is to use an enrollment key.
Who else should be here?
People from LACE