Post graduation year of service: Opportunity to pursue meaning and purpose

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In 2000 Lilly Endowment announced this initiative which supports theological schools in establishing or sustaining programs for high school youth that stimulate and foster an excitement about theological learning and ministry and (2) identify and encourage talented Christian youth to consider vocational options in the ministry. The immediate goal of these projects is to nurture in young people new habits, disciplines, and relationships essential to the Christian life and to encourage youth to think theologically about contemporary issues. The long-term goal is to recruit a cadre of intellectually skilled Christian youth who will become ordained ministers and committed lay leaders in their churches and society.

Who will be the next generation of Christian pastors? Who will lead the church in the new millennium? Where and how will these young people be recruited, called, and trained? How can churches encourage youth to consider the vocation of ministry in light of their faith commitments and theological traditions? And how can they attract young people with spiritual gifts into Christian ministry?

The Endowment believes that theological schools can play a critical role in addressing these important questions. Seminaries and divinity schools are centers of inquiry, teaching, and learning where critical questions about the human condition are asked, where theological texts and
Lilly’s PTEV college program
Between 2000 and 2002, the Endowment awarded grants to 88 church-related colleges and universities to:

- Assist students in examining the relationship between faith and vocational choices;
- Provide opportunities for gifted young people to explore Christian ministry; and
- Enhance the capacity of a school's faculty and staff to teach and mentor students effectively in this arena.

www.ptev.org offers:  Text Bibliography  Movie Bibliography  Course Syllabi
Positive Psychology suggests:

- Religiousness/spirituality matters
- Religious, spiritual and interfaith leaders matter
- Religious institutions matter and making a place for spirituality in “secular” institutions matter
Post-College: Volunteers Exploring Vocation – a Project of the Fund for Theological Education

- help recent college graduates embark on a theological exploration of vocation.
- helps participants explore the relationship between faith and work, and consider career paths geared toward serving others, lifting up Christian ministry in particular.
- provides structured discussions and materials that guide program participants through personal reflection about their lives and professional goals.
- Offers national conference. Eleven volunteers will receive a $2,500 VEV Fellowship to pursue an M.Div
Faith-based, year-long young adult volunteer programs

- Mission Year
- Brethren Volunteer Service
- Catholic Volunteers in Florida
- DOOR
- Jesuit Volunteer Corps
- Krista Foundation for Global Citizenship
- Lutheran Volunteer Corps
- Mennonite Voluntary Service
- Notre Dame Mission Volunteers
- Episcopal Service Corps
- Presbyterian Church (USA) Young Adult Volunteers
- US2 Program of the United Methodist Church
Survey responses

- Volunteers Exploring Vocation Program Evaluation

- Based on Surveys of 2007-2008 Exiting Volunteers (n=73) and 2008-2009 Entering Volunteers (n=580)
AmeriCorps follow-up study:

- “Over the last eight years, since 1999, we have been following more than 2,000 individuals in AmeriCorps State and National and NCCC to look at the effect of service on their future civic engagement and volunteering, employment and careers, and educational attainment.

- Findings reveal that AmeriCorps is a pipeline to careers in public service and creates civic leaders who continue to serve in their communities long after their service has been completed.”

http://www.americorps.gov/about/role_impact/index.asp
Bonner Scholar program follow-up

- Using survey questions drawn from UCLA’s Life After College Survey, all graduates were found still doing community service six years after graduation compared to approximately two-thirds of each national comparison group.
- Alumni were more also likely than comparison groups to be civically engaged, particularly in activities requiring dialogue.
Common Fire findings:

- Common experience of 100 adults who have sustained commitment to working on behalf of the whole human family was a deeply engaging experience crossing a perceived boundaries with the other – travel, service, military, work, etc.

Other studies evidencing power of dialogue across difference:

- Social change model study of multiple campuses by Susan Komives, Univ. of Md.
- Sylvia Hurtado, UCLA-HERI
- Ernest Pascarella et al.
VEV Cases

- Join a small group to discuss an excerpt from a volunteer’s exiting reflections
What stood out - ranked

- Self awareness, self acceptance, growth
- Simplicity
- Found or affirmed calling or direction for future
- Spiritual growth and exploration
- Relationships, dialogue and/or community
- Developed work experience and skills
- Cognitive perspective on bringing about change
- Developed or furthered commitment to making positive change or working for social justice
Most important program elements ranked

- Retreats with my fellow volunteers
- Peer dialogue/mentoring/networking
- Site supervisor support and dialogue
- Retreats with VEV groups
- Informal interaction with staff
- Formal interactions/settings with staff and fellow volunteers
- Collaboration/involvement with church(es)
- Theological reflection/studies/worship
- Spiritual direction/mentoring
Most important opportunities ranked

- work for social justice
- discover things about myself *
- do community service
- work with people who are different from me*
- develop new skills
- reflection and dialogue*
Opportunities that increased in importance

- Opportunity to discover things about myself
- Opportunity to work with people who are different from me
- Opportunity for reflection and dialogue
- Opportunity for social life and friendships
Opportunities that decreased in importance

- Opportunity for community service
- Opportunity to be an effective social change agent
- Opportunity to find expressions of my compassion
- Opportunity to find God in daily life
- Opportunity to discover what God desires for my life
- Opportunity to help a community address its challenges and needs
- Opportunity to find work matching my personality, skills, training
- Opportunity for following through on faith commitments
Relationship to Positive Psychology

- Pillars: Experiences, Traits, Relationships, Institutions
- 6 categories: Wisdom, Courage, Humanity, Justice, Temperance, Transcendence
- Character best created or revealed through Challenge
Questions:

- Understanding complexity of systemic change a major outcome?
- How important are quality of relationships at work?
- How do we best support college seniors?
- If peer relationships are most important, how do we help build deeply dialogical relationships in college?
- How can we support elements of the college experience that enhance development?
- Are the gains of college not fully realized until young adults have had a year of sustained work and challenge?
What prepared them for the experience?

- personal reflection 73%
- family  63%
- international travel experiences  52%
- (other) travel experiences  26%
- work or internship experiences  60%
- academic studies  54%
- religious and spiritual training and experiences  52%
- service-learning  40%
- retreat experiences  36%
Discerning a calling to serve as clergy

- How can denominational churches be vehicles to address social justice, build community and provide dialogue partners? Who or what will be their support when their parishioners aren’t interested in social justice concerns? While they have gained tremendous appreciation for the “other” in their frequent service work with those of different backgrounds and races, will they feel called to serve this group as a religious leader?
Who are their models?

- Are there at least two paths – serving the poor, who may not “look” like them or serving people with similar backgrounds as a clergy person, but inviting that community into caring for the social justice issues that have been so present for the VEV volunteers in their work? Who are their models for these paths?
Frederick Buechner

- Finding the place where the hearts deep gladness meets the world’s deep hunger