

## **The Foundation's Origins**

The roots of the Graduate Theological Foundation reach back to the convening of Vatican II in 1962, when the Conference on Religious Development was formed to undertake theological and religious education programs in the context of the newly emerging ecumenical relationships among the various Protestant and Catholic communions. During the following years the Conference conducted a variety of residential programs at the Conference Center at Madison, Connecticut, for professionals in ministry and education, and members of religious communities.

During these early days as a continuing education institute for clergy and religious, the Foundation offered an “experientially-directed” study/retreat program for individuals and small groups with a creative/experimental curriculum. Then, while developing a program for Anglican, Lutheran, and Catholic clergy in Indiana, the Foundation moved to an “institution-directed” program with full on-site residency requirements, an established curriculum, and a defined faculty. Subsequently, and in response to participants' expressed desire for greater flexibility and range of educational opportunities, the Foundation developed a “co-directed” program requiring only half residency at the Foundation and the balance at various other institutions including Oxford and Rome, with a variety of curricular and faculty options. All of these developments have been in the spirit of responsiveness to the perceived needs of ministry professionals the Foundation seeks to serve.

The latest stage of development explained herein reflects the Foundation's commitment to nurture and enhance professional “self-directed” education. From an early experiential-based program to an institution-based program and then to a co-directed program, the Foundation has now moved to a totally self-directed program which is in keeping with its commitment to address the educational needs of ministry professionals in the twenty-first century.

The State of Indiana granted the Foundation its corporate charter as a graduate institution to engage in advanced professional education for those in ministry, with correlated concerns of research and publication. Under its charter, the Foundation conducts graduate programs and awards degrees to professionals already fully credentialed in a wide range of both faith-based and secular-oriented ministries. The Foundation maintains arrangements with leading academic institutions in the United States and abroad where graduate degree candidates may complete their programs. In addition to providing a wide range of academic experiences and opportunities for highly specialized study as an integral part of a candidate's program, these inter-institutional arrangements contribute significantly to the Foundation's maintenance of high professional academic standards.

The Foundation maintains consultative relationships with a number of religious denominations and ecclesiastical judicatories. By designating an official liaison officer from their own professional staffs, these international bodies provide the Foundation with much valuable insight into the direction ministry education is going and needs to go as we face the new century. This consultative relationship with various denominations is an

important component of the Foundation's process of accountability to ecclesial bodies and their ministries.

Furthermore, the Foundation has developed three levels of academic relationships in its graduate studies programs. The highest level of cooperation and academic involvement has been reserved by the Foundation specifically for the Oxford University Department for Continuing Education and the Centro Pro Unione in Rome. The second level of cooperation is with the select educational sites that enter into a P.R.I.M.E. (Partnering Resources in Ministry Education) relationship with the Foundation. The third designation is given to carefully chosen institutions in recognition of the high quality of educational programming provided, thereby designating them Recognized and Endorsed institutions.

The Foundation is completely independent from any other institution or body, is state and federally tax-exempt as a non-profit graduate institution, and its operational funds are generated primarily by participants' fees. The Foundation, with its configuration of educational programs rather than of endowments and property, is dedicated to the further development of research and publication projects correlated with programs and activities reflective of its mission.

Application and admission to Foundation programs of those who are practitioners in any field of professional ministry customarily presumes that credentialing, by the appropriate ecclesiastical or professional agency, has preceded the candidate's pursuit of the terminal degree.

Given both the physical mobility of professionals today and their immediate access via telecommunications to a virtual mega-university of course offerings, workshops, conferences and study programs, the Foundation has endeavored to create and maintain an educational environment within which the truly creative and self-motivated professional can develop a personalized educational package best suited for individually perceived needs, thereby avoiding the restrictiveness of an on-site, one-curriculum-based residency program which presumes one size fits all. The Foundation believes this movement away from bureaucratic procedure and towards self-directed professionalism is what is being called for by individuals in ministry today. This trend, we believe, calls for a new paradigm in ministry education such as that being developed by the Graduate Theological Foundation.