October 2018

Dear Friends,

The stories our students tell of how their ministries have been shaped by their time at ESR are most certainly the best gauge of how we are doing and why we commit ourselves to the work we do here. I asked a current student and a recent graduate to share their stories with us, both of which offer hope and encouragement as we look toward the future of ministry in our communities.

“My time at ESR has been significant in my spiritual development and formation.”

Current student Beth Henricks splits her time between being an ESR student and serving as Christian Education Director for Indianapolis First Friends. “I have been on a slow track of study as I have a very full job in ministry at Indianapolis First Friends. But each class has opened my eyes to new ways of reading and interpreting the Bible, understanding the history of Christianity, deepening my prayer life, understanding my theology, studying different points of view and ways to put my faith into action. I was raised in an evangelical tradition and went to a Baptist high school and Christian college (Taylor University). I had studied the Bible quite extensively. But this time at ESR has been heart opening as I have been able to view my reading and understanding the Bible through a very different lens. I have been challenged in my thinking and how I live out my faith in the world.”

Beth also shared how the community she has discovered at ESR has had a deep and lasting effect on her life during a difficult time of transition. “My first intensive class in August of 2016 was a profound time of connection and community for me as I was grieving the loss of my husband that spring. I felt loved and supported as I examined my sadness and pain in the company of friends. I continue to value and treasure the spiritual friendships I have made as we continue to support and pray for each other remotely.”

“My time at ESR was heavenly.”

Tracy Davis graduated from ESR in 2016 and is a member of Durango Friends Meeting (CO). She has continued her connection with ESR through leading student trips to India with professor Lonnie Valentine. This January, she and Valentine will lead their second contextual theology trip there together. “The deep pluralism that can be found in India among Hindu, Muslim, Jain, Buddhist, Bahai, Sikh, Jewish and Christian devotees is remarkable,” shared Davis. “Students
were moved and inspired by seeing first hand and joining people of other faiths in devotional practices. Many participants reported that they were able to understand better the worldviews of other traditions when they could witness and experience the social contexts and learn about the histories of these other faiths. Traveling, as a Christian devotee, to pray with saints and sages in India and guiding these journeys is the ministry that has fed my soul most in this lifetime.”

Reflecting on her time as a student at ESR, Davis shared, “I was able to devote time to religious practice, self-understanding, emptying, humbling, clarifying, reflection and construction of a coherent personal theology. I can’t imagine a better opportunity for intellectual and spiritual growth and for following Brother Lawrence in ‘the practice of the presence of God.’ ”

What a gift Beth and Tracy are to us and to the communities in which they offer their ministry! We are thankful for their stories and for the support you offer to help make them possible.

Your gift to the ESR Annual Fund ensures that we have the resources available to help the ministries of our students and alumni thrive. I hope you will prayerfully consider continuing your support of ESR today.

With deep gratitude,

Mandy Ford
Director of Community Engagement