At the heart of the Hispanic Theological Initiative’s (HTI) mission is the cultivation of scholars/leaders who have been formed by their community, intellectually advanced in the academy, and prepared via HTI’s programming to serve the larger ecology of theological and religious education.

It is joyful and exciting to discover new ways and opportunities to serve HTI scholars and graduates, and to witness the new vocational paths they are taking, as well as their contributions at developing new curriculum, programming, lectures, monographs, etc. Having to adjust to a new era of hybridity, however, is quite a tall order, especially as technology continues to evolve at such a rapid pace. It is daunting, to say the least—but when I take a breath, this journey is still exhilarating.

This year’s cover of HTI’s annual brochure appropriately features a butterfly—a symbol of hope, metamorphosis, and new beginnings—bridging two hills on which individuals/institutions, at different stages in their journey, support one another towards reaching their goals. Through the commitment of dedicated member schools, funders, mentors, editors, faculty members, and partners, HTI’s en conjunto support has been the bridge that holistically nurtures scholars as they work to finish their doctorate and become contributors to the larger ecology of theological and religious education. The cover represents a powerful beacon of growth and new beginnings, the power of transformation, and the incredible feats HTI scholars must achieve to reach the finish line.

It is with this springtime metaphor of transformation that HTI welcomes the 70 Scholars enrolled for the 2023–2024 academic year. Beginning on page 6, you can read the HTI Scholars’ bios and learn about their journeys and aspirations.

We are grateful and overjoyed to share the number of ways HTI has grown wings and evolved during this past academic year of 2022–2023. Among the wonderful moments of growth and achievements that transpired are nine successful dissertation defenses, which raise the number of HTI graduates to 165! These HTI graduates continue to be employed in full-time positions in the academy, the church, and in non-profit organizations that advance theological and religious education.

En conjunto with funders, and partners, HTI expanded its program offerings. In April 2023, the first cohort of women completed the Latinas in Leadership program, introduced in September of 2021, with the support of the Lilly Endowment Inc. Additionally, a Trinity Church Wall Street grant enabled HTI to build and offer the Professional Development Conference (PDC) fully online to 25 HTI Scholars and non-enrolled PhD students.

In August of 2022, HTI, the Hispanic Summer Program (HSP), and Hispanic Youth Leadership Academy (HYLA) developed and began offering jointly the Latine Doctoral Accompaniment Seminar (LDAS) to prepare master-level students to write strong applications for admissions to PhD programs and for fellowships.

With your ongoing support of time, treasure, and talent, HTI works with excitement to advance Latine scholarship and leadership across the broader landscape of theological and religious education. As demonstrated by its history, HTI believes in the “butterfly effect,” trusting that seemingly small actions do impact larger systems and future generations. We thank you for working with HTI and encourage you to stay connected and to give for the betterment of individuals and communities across the nation and the world.

Blessings,

Joanne Rodríguez
Executive Director
HTI STORY

Two decades prior to HTI’s inception, the Fund for Theological Education (FTE), now the Forum for Theological Exploration, implemented two programs that supported 198 Hispanic students at the master’s-level for ministry and for the doctorate level. In 1986, The Pew Charitable Trusts (Pew) provided FTE with a planning grant for Dr. Justo L. González along with an advisory team to conduct a study titled, “The Theological Education of Hispanics,” which was published in 1988. The study was pivotal for Pew’s philanthropic strategy in supporting Hispanic Americans in religious and theological education.

After a Pew study conducted by Dr. Luis Rivera-Pagán and Dr. Rosendo Urrabazo in 1994, Pew decided to withdraw its funding for Hispanic students, yet Dr. Joel Carpenter and the Rev. Danny Cortes, then Pew director and program officer of religion programs, were committed to establishing a new program to develop leaders for the church and the academic community.

Using a planning grant to conduct a new needs assessment study and design process, they hired Dr. Edwin Hernández to lay the groundwork for the Pew Hispanic Scholarship Study, and with the support of the advisory team including Dr. Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, Dr. Justo L. González, Dr. Allan Figueroa-Deck, Dr. David Maldonado, Dr. Olga Villaparra, Dr. Ana María Pineda, and Ms. Sarita Brown, they wrote the study titled, “The Future of Hispanics Graduate Theological Education.” In 1995, Hernández submitted to Pew a grant proposal for the HTI. As a result, HTI was launched at Emory University under the directorship of Dr. Justo L. González and Dr. Daisy Machado with a $3.5 million grant, which was renewed in 2001, and a final grant in 2005 for $1.8 million. In the fall of 1996, HTI awarded its first fellowships.

In 1999, HTI was relocated to Princeton Theological Seminary and Dr. Zaida Maldonado Pérez became its new director. During Pérez’s tenure, she introduced the HTI Book Prize and Latinas in Theology. From 2002 to present, the Rev. Joanne Rodríguez, executive director, has worked collaboratively with a variety of advisors, mentors, and editors to develop and maintain the unprecedented completion rate of 93% with an average time to degree of 5.5 years.

In 2003, HTI received an $888,000 grant from the Lilly Endowment Inc., and in 2007, 17 PhD-granting institutions launched the HTI Consortium to expand the recruitment, retention, and graduation rates of Latine PhD students. Today, the Consortium stands at 23 members. In 2010, HTI was awarded the Examples of Excelencia award at the graduate-level from Excelencia in Education!, catapulting the HTI vision and model into the larger landscape of education in the United States. Since then, HTI is known as the “411 Hub” for Latinx theological and religious resources, and is relied upon by presidents, deans, faculty, and students for resources and networks. In 2011, HTI received a $400,000 grant from the Henry Luce Foundation to provide fellowships to post-comprehensive examination/dissertation HTI scholars.

HTI celebrated its 20th Anniversary in 2016 with a corporate gift of $100,000 from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and a $1.5 million grant from the Lilly Endowment Inc., which provided ten $25,000 dissertation fellowships to students yearly for five years.

In November 2017, HTI received $475,000 from the Henry Luce Foundation to widen and enhance the audience of HTI’s Perspectivas peer-reviewed bilingual journal by building Open Plaza, a platform to address key Latine social issues.

Also in 2017, HTI received a planning grant from the Lilly Endowment Inc. titled, “Synergies to Nurture, Improve, and Advance Latine Religious and Theological Leaders/Scholars.” This grant supported three new initiatives: First, a gathering of Higher Education Denominational Leaders to discuss opportunities and challenges in serving Hispanic leaders’ educational goals; second, a Mentoring Pilot Program for First Call to nurture and address the needs of HTI graduates who are in their first position; and third, a Mentoring Internship Program for current HTI Scholars to explore diverse ways in which they can utilize their doctoral degrees to serve in diverse contexts. Each of the new initiatives were carried out in 2018, and their success led to HTI receiving a $1.4 million grant from the Lilly Endowment Inc., in March 2019. This grant allows HTI to continue the Mentoring Program for First Call and the Mentoring Internship Program. With this grant, HTI developed a Latinas in Theology Leadership Program to create opportunities for Latina scholars to apply for leadership positions in theological and religious education institutions and will strengthen HTI’s evaluation capacity allowing it to measure its more than 20 years of Mentoring and Professional Development Curriculum.

During the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature annual meetings in November 2019, HTI launched Open Plaza (htiopeopenpla. org), a virtual gathering space to amplify Latinx voices in the global public space through blogs, podcasts, and HTI Video Talks. Open Plaza is uniquely designed for Latinx intellectuals in religion and theology to connect with a broader audience and exchange resources and ideas that contribute to advancing the well-being of Latinx communities and society at large.

In 2020, HTI received a $1.6 million grant, which allows HTI to continue providing ten $25,000 dissertation fellowships to students yearly for four years. And in 2021, Trinity Wall Street granted HTI $100,000 to digitize the Professional Development Curriculum for Latine Faith Leaders and Scholars.

Furthermore, as your HTI celebrated its silver jubilee, HTI was awarded a $7.3 million grant from Lilly Endowment Inc.! This grant allows HTI to establish a new program to assist master’s students in navigating their journey toward PhD programs, provide fellowships to pre-dissertation doctoral students, generate novel internships with non-profit organizations through collaborative means, and much more.

HTI holds Affiliate Member Status with the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada.