1. Executive Summary of LeTourneau’s Proposal for the Passage Program

The faculty of the School of Theology and Vocation at LeTourneau University (LETU) are called to serve the God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit by equipping students to discern and fulfill their vocation to participate in the triune God’s mission of reconciliation and restoration to all creation. LETU is an interdenominational, evangelical university whose purpose is to equip students to understand their vocation in light of the triune God’s grand story of redemption as revealed in scripture, nurture Christian virtue, and contribute to the enrichment and service of local and global communities. LETU and the School of Theology and Vocation are thankful to the Lilly Endowment for focusing our attention on the need for and possibility of this Christian formation before college. In response to the Lilly Endowment’s call for proposals for theology institutes for high school students, we propose a year-long experience of intentional mentoring in partnership with local churches, anchored upon Passage: a week-long camp. LETU will train the mentors to prepare and send high school students from the Ark-La-Tex region to the week-long camp and to reintegrate them and their newfound knowledge and experiences back into the life of their local church. During the camp the students will study the biblical story of God’s cosmic mission and God’s calling of a people to participate in that mission, inhabit historic Christian practices for the discernment of and faithful response to God’s call, and develop theological insights into living out their calling in the contemporary world. This year-long mentoring experience will enrich and strengthen the students’ week-long camp experience. Thus, the Passage program aims to raise up a new generation of ministers and lay Christians who will lead the church to participate in God’s mission to the world through responding to the call to become disciples of Jesus Christ in all of life.

2. Purpose and Goals of Passage

At the heart of this proposal is a vision: students transformed for Christian leadership in all areas of life through faithful response to the triune God’s call to participate in God’s cosmic mission of reconciliation and restoration. The purpose of Passage’s year-long mentoring experience and the week-long interdenominational camp is to immerse students in the grand drama of Christian scripture, to equip them with historic Christian practices for discerning and fulfilling their vocations, and to cultivate the theological acumen necessary for thoughtful engagement with diverse neighbors and neighboring communities.

Drawing on the best of the evangelical tradition, broadly conceived, every aspect of the Passage program will revolve around this vision and concomitant mission. The crucial project goals are as follows: 1) proclaim and explain the good news of the triune God’s reconciling love; 2) equip students to participate in God’s creation-wide mission by hearing, accepting, and inhabiting their callings to walk in the way of the Lord Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit; 3) develop the theological resources and formative practices necessary for faithful discipleship; 4) cultivate Christian leaders who bring evangelical and interdenominational resources to bear on the task of understanding, analyzing, critiquing, reforming, and creating culture; and 5) form a new generation of Christian ministers and lay leaders who nurture the participation of local churches in the mission of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to the world.

Every year, LETU welcomes hundreds of students just out of high school onto our campus and into our community. These eager new students fill our freshmen-level theology classes. Teaching them is the heart of the theology faculty’s work. While a privilege and immensely rewarding, this teaching gives us great insight into the theological formation actually occurring in Christian churches and para-church organizations. Although we see a range of formation, our experience indicates great need for richer engagement with the Bible, deeper theological education, and more intentional and
thorough cultivation of historic Christian practices. When it comes to Christian scripture, we find few students who can offer a coherent picture of the biblical story and mission of God, and most students have superficial knowledge even of key figures like Abraham or Paul and key moments like Sinai or Pentecost. Most students have some experience with Christian practices such as prayer and worship. Yet, they tend to have theologically thin understandings of the meaning and purpose of these practices and little experience of practices such as Sabbath keeping, silence, or fasting; forms of Christian prayer such as the Lord’s Prayer; and forms of Christian worship such as lament. Moreover, our students tend to have very basic knowledge of the vocabulary and grammar of Christian theology with little to no training in moving thoughtfully from the Christian faith to Christian ethics—especially when it comes to calling and work. Brief slogans or proof-texts that are easily emptied of Christian content tend to stand in for theological ethics: “pursue excellence in all that you do,” or “do everything unto the Lord,” or “Christian business is good business.” Emotions and intuitions often determine responses to ethical issues rather than serious investigation of scripture and Christian ethical traditions or the contributions of various disciplines to understanding and framing these issues. Finally, only a tiny number of our students have even considered that God might be calling them into full-time or ordained ministry.

What we do see, however, are open and enthusiastic learners. We cannot emphasize this point enough. Most of our students want to learn and are willing to wrestle with the grammar and logic of the Christian faith, address the complexity of ethical decisions, and engage in historic Christian practices. LETU students are largely untouched by the preceding generation’s cynicism and desperately want to grow into Christian leaders prepared to hear and follow when God calls. This gives us reason to hope that the resources (seeds) the Lilly Endowment and LETU sow into high school students through Passage will grow and bear fruit.

3. Organizational Appropriateness

The desire of LETU’s theology faculty to equip students to discern and inhabit their vocation from God animates this proposal. Although from a variety of ecclesial backgrounds, the faculty are united by this desire to help students hear and respond to God’s call. Two recently redesigned freshmen-level courses stand at the core of the theology faculty’s ministry at LETU. Together, these courses introduce students to the broad sweep of the story of the God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God’s work of creation, reconciliation, and restoration, and God’s call to share in this story and to participate in God’s cosmic mission of reconciliation and restoration. Two upper-level classes deepen this biblical, theological and practical foundation and allow students to bring theology into dialogue with the other disciplines at LETU as they seek to live in response to God’s call.

In turn, LETU has assembled this faculty and approved these courses because they fulfill its mission of cultivating Christian virtue and integrating Christian faith and work through understanding vocation within the triune God’s grand story of redemption revealed in scripture. LETU was founded in the belief that God’s call is not limited to those who are called into full-time or ordained ministry and missions. LETU’s founder, R.G. LeTourneau, was convinced that all sorts of work could be a holy calling with eternal impact. If that is the case, then the goal of vocational discernment is not simply figuring out whether one is called or not. Rather, the goal is to discern one’s particular calling and then learn to inhabit even “secular” callings without ceasing to be a disciple of Jesus. This integration of faith and work—with special emphasis on learning as a particular type of work—requires faith that God has reconciled all things in heaven and on earth by making peace through the blood of the cross. The integration of faith and work, then, is not something accomplished by human hands, but something discovered and entered through grace. Moreover, the Christian life has a particular shape, patterned on the one who lived and died truly well, Jesus Christ. LETU refers to this
pattern of the good life—and the good death—as “Christian virtue” and aims to foster these virtues in students through theological studies, curricular and co-curricular experiences with Christian practices, and developing a flourishing community of worship, friendships, and mentoring.

Through Passage, LETU accepts the Lilly Endowment’s invitation to extend our mission to high school students—both because it is a worthy extension of LETU’s mission and because we believe that it will give us better insight into fulfilling our mission to college students. With regard to the former, we believe that we are doing some things well and have valuable expertise when it comes to vocation that would greatly benefit high school students—and through them the worldwide Christian church. With regard to the latter, we can always improve in our mission to develop Christian virtue and integrate faith and work, particularly in weaving study, worship, service and historic Christian practices into a seamless garment. Often, our academic emphasis and the tendency toward “silo-ing” the co-curricular and the curricular (and even the disciplines within the curricular) works against developing this seamless garment, but Passage offers a fresh opportunity to bring these elements together.

Besides being a natural extension of LETU’s mission, the Passage program fits well with LETU’s 2015-2020 Strategic Plan. The plan’s first goal is to cultivate better connections within the Ark-La-Tex region and to better serve its population (ethnically diverse with significant numbers of children in low-income households). Passage offers an opportunity to develop these relationships via work of the half-time work of the Director of Outreach and to serve our neighbors by bringing them onto campus and sharing the goods of Christian education. The second goal is to nurture a God-honoring workplace where faculty, staff, and students flourish through integrating our faith and work. Passage will focus our attention on developing a thicker account of God’s calling and its relation to human flourishing through theological study and co-curricular practices.

4. Design

Historically, evangelicals excel at facilitating mountain-top experiences for high school youth. We have been less successful, however, in coupling that experience with solid theological education and in integrating those experiences into everyday life and decision-making. Aware of both the strengths and the weaknesses of evangelical youth formation, LETU aims to construct an intentional program of biblical, theological, and ethical education with an emphasis on cultivating Christian practices that inscribe this education into everyday life and provide ways of integrating it into decision-making. The structure of the Passage program draws on the best of the evangelical tradition and wisdom from cultural anthropology in describing “rites of passage.” Echoing the transcultural pattern of moving from adolescence to adulthood through rites of separation, liminality, and reintegration, Passage structures this pattern into a biblical pilgrimage: an intentional journey toward a place of theophany but with a view to the whole journey as a transformational experience—meaning that the pilgrim returns to everyday life changed and ready to live in a new way. As such, Passage acts as a both parable and embodiment of the Christian call to discipleship. The Passage journey is marked by the three movements of the paradigmatic journey: the Israelite Exodus from Egypt. First, God calls Israel out of Egypt. Then, God gathers Israel at Mount Sinai, the place of theophany. Finally, God sends Israel into the land of promise, although this sending itself becomes a call to Israel to gather in the land.

Calling (Preparation)

This phase is initiated by the Director of Outreach, working through the fall and winter to register a cohort of fifty high school students for the year-long Passage program. A key step in this process will be the students’ formal commitment to the camp in April by paying the $100 registration fee.
Although a small portion of the actual cost of Passage, this fee or a scholarship request letter require participant buy-in. As Passage will reach out to the low-income students in our region, we offer “scholarships” (initially simply waivers of the fee, though we hope to find a donor to turn them into true scholarships that help defray the costs of Passage). Once a student has committed to the program, the Director of Outreach will work with the student’s home church, pastors, church leaders, and parents to choose a mentor for the student. Ideally, the mentor will come from the same church as the student. The mentor should be a mature Christian adult who demonstrates commitment through prayer, presence, gifts, service, and witness as well as a willingness to learn and grow.

Each mentor will attend a one day Mentor Training in May. This seminar will introduce them to the Passage program and the role they will play in calling the students to intentional, prayerful preparation, full participation in the Passage gatherings, and integrating what they have learned into daily life. This guidance will occur via monthly meetings with the student through the next May. To begin this process, the mentors will receive an overview of the Passage program as well as theological resources developed by the Director of Theology. At the Mentor Training, LETU’s theology faculty will equip them for their task by providing a biblical account of vocation, explaining the theological ramifications of this account of vocation, and providing practical wisdom for working with high school students. In addition, the retreat will provide opportunities for the mentors to discuss their ministry with one another and the theology faculty to hear about the blessings and needs of local churches. The Director of Programming will plan the retreat and organize logistics with the help of the new administrative assistant.

Following Mentor Training, mentors will return to their churches and students. A consecration ceremony will be a public affirmation of the mentor’s (and, ideally, the local church’s) commitment to shepherd the student into Christian maturity. By affirming their call to participate in Passage and sending them on their journey, this ceremony formally separates the student from the normal life of “home.”

Gathering (Passage Camp)

Following the sending ceremony, students will attend Passage Camp, running from a Sunday evening to a Saturday morning in June on LETU’s Longview campus. While the main movement of the Passage Camp is gathering, each day will involve calling and sending as well to help the students understand the rhythm of the Christian life. Every day will have a main biblical theme that orients our praise, prayer, study, service, practices and discussions. Over the course of the camp we will cover the broad strokes of the drama of scripture, the loci communes of Christian doctrine, and a set of historic Christian practices. The practices are particularly important given evangelical tendencies to reduce the Christian faith to a set of beliefs or a worldview (often as a reaction against an overly experiential vision of Christianity). The practices help students inscribe what they are learning into their lives as well as reminding them that God calls us to more than mental assent. Among these practices, praise and prayer on the one hand, and service on the other, provide the basic context for this gathering. As God calls his people to call upon him (cf. Ps. 50:15 and 91:15), praise and worship are at the heart of our vocation. By making these central to Passage, students will learn and experience the integral relationship between vocation and invocation. Indeed, as worship is the true end (telos) of humanity, our shared times of praise and prayer remind us that liturgical gatherings are real life, not an escape from it and they give us a vision of what our work ought to do in this world, not just how we ought to work.

Sunday evening (day 1) will center on the themes of welcome, wayfaring, and worship. We will practice hospitality as we welcome our guests onto campus and introduce them to the people, plans,
and places of Passage. Our first shared activity will be a prayer of commitment in the cafeteria followed by a shared meal. After dinner we will engage in worship and study of scripture, with a condensed telling of the story of God and God’s pilgrim people along with a time of praise focusing on becoming a wayfaring people conformed to God’s story. We will conclude with our first round of discussion, sharing our understanding of vocation, both in general and personally.

On Monday (day 2), we will focus on the identity of the triune God and our calling to share together in God’s triune life of love. The day will begin with a time of guided prayer and journaling and proceed to breakfast. After breakfast, our time of worship will focus on praising the triune God. We will then undertake a service project that addresses human discord and conflict such as painting over graffiti or working at Hiway 80, a local men’s and women’s shelter. We will eat lunch on-site and provide students an opportunity to meet people involved in work that addresses this discord and conflict. After cooling off, students will be able to choose from a series of workshops on the relationship between Christian scripture and the doctrine of the Trinity. Dinner will follow and after dinner our worship and teaching this evening will focus on God’s eternal triune life and communion together in this life of love as the goal (telos) of humanity. The day will conclude with Christian conferencing on how our understanding of vocation has begun to change, both in general and personally.

On Tuesday (day 3), God’s act of creation and our own calling as created beings in creation will be our focus. Again, the day begins with guided prayer and journaling, then proceeds to breakfast. We then will head out for a half-day canoe journey on Caddo Lake, the only natural lake in Texas and home to an amazing swamp and bayou ecosystem. This encounter with a beautiful patch of God’s creation also will serve as a living parable of the Christian life of pilgrimage, providing analogies and illustrations of what we see in scripture and have experienced in our own lives. We will return to campus for a series of workshops on interpreting biblical creation passages in light of one another—with an eye to some of the epistemological and ethical questions raised by these passages and the variety of ways they have been interpreted by Christians. After eating dinner, we will enter into a time of praising God’s mighty act of creation and God’s providence within creation.

Wednesday (day 4) focuses on creation’s rebellion against the Creator and the implications for our calling. We will begin our day with guided prayer and journaling and then eat breakfast together. Our time of morning worship will be replaced by a lesson on the way that personal and structural sin distorts our relationship with both the Creator and other created beings and an introduction to the practice of silence. That time will dovetail nicely with a service project responding to the destruction and distortion of creation (likely a clean-up of some kind). The afternoon workshops will invite students to wrestle with the ways that personal and structural sin distort not only how we go about work, but also what the various professions and industries do in and to the world. A simple dinner follows this discussion, preparing for a time of teaching on what sin is and what it does in and to creation, a worship service of repentance and Christian conferencing on the practice of repentance and confession.

On Thursday (day 5), we will begin our day with a brief reminder of the gospel and a time of worship, praising the triune Reconciler. We will then break our fast together and take some time for guided prayer and journaling. Today we will serve local churches and parachurches acting as ambassadors of God’s reconciliation. Back at LETU, students will encounter a series of workshops examining patristic models of the atonement, biblical accounts of reconciliation, and considering what might get left out or overemphasized in contemporary evangelistic presentations. After dinner, a speaker will develop a biblical theology of reconciliation and we will praise the God who saves and remember our calling to announce this good news. The day will conclude with Christian
conferencing on our how the calling to be God’s ambassadors pervades callings to particular places, persons, and professions.

Friday (day 6) will focus on God’s plans to restore and renew creation. Beginning with a time of guided personal prayer and journaling, we will move into breakfast, a time of worship focusing on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and then our final service project. After this service project, we will divide into workshop groups to discuss the way in which our service this week presents us with dilemmas regarding the coming of the kingdom of God: Is the kingdom of God now or in the future? Does our work usher in the kingdom or not? Following dinner, we will learn about God’s plans for the restoration and renewal of creation, moving from the resurrection of Jesus Christ to some eschatological texts in the Old and New Testaments and singing songs of expectation and longing of this new heaven and new earth. Our final Christian conferencing will explore how God’s work of renewal and restoration helps us discern both how we should do our work and what our work should do in the world.

Saturday (day 7) will begin with a final on-campus exercise in guided prayer and journaling. After breakfast we will gather together for one last time of worship with a focus on being sent—ending by sending students back “home” with a commission to discern and inhabit their vocations.

The camp will be staffed by the three co-directors, the administrative assistant, five LETU theology faculty members, and ten LETU students (junior and seniors). The Director of Programming will coordinate the scheduling, food, housing, travel, and other logistics as well as acting as camp director. The Director of Theology will oversee the provision of resource materials and teaching sessions. The Director of Outreach will continue in a liaison role through the handling of all communication and social networking during the camp. The administrative assistant will act as assistant director and provide logistical support. The ten LETU students will be chosen by the theology faculty for their combination of theological knowledge and pastoral gifts. They will serve as resident assistants in the dorms, occasional discussion leaders, and logistical aides. Also, four of these camp staff will serve as the worship band for the camp. The five members of the theology faculty will serve as the primary teachers during the week. The staff will gather to pray and train for the Friday and Saturday prior to the camp. LETU will also invite other “community speakers” to Passage Camp: mature Christian men and women who will share their understanding of Christian vocation in light of their own chosen field of work—with an emphasis on ministry and missions. These speakers will share their testimonies, focused on the day’s theme, after most breakfasts and dinners and remain with us for the next few hours to allow students to ask questions and to interact with them.

Being Sent (Commissioning)

Mentors will receive instruction and resource materials for welcoming the student back “home,” continuing to discern vocation, and “next steps” for a lifetime of discipleship. This will be facilitated through continued monthly student-mentor meetings. Mentors will be provided with additional resources and practical guidance for making these meetings rich and fruitful.

Students and their mentors are invited and encouraged to attend the Reunion Retreat in November on LETU’s campus. This day will enrich their relationships through lessons on ongoing faithfulness and the difficulty of following Jesus daily, praise for the steadfast love and mercy of God, and Christian conferencing in search of practical wisdom for remaining faithful in everyday life and new decisions. The gathering will serve as a mid-year touchpoint to evaluate the student-mentor relationship and provide encouragement to “finish the race.”
Students are encouraged to attend a second *Passage* Camp at the end of their passage year, which serves as an evaluative and closure experience and help students put into perspective their new knowledge, understanding, and maturity. Teaching sessions and workshops beginning in year two will be divided between Passage 101 and Passage 201 to allow returners to go deeper with the theological instruction. All other aspects of the camp will remain the same.

Finally, following the second Passage camp, students will return to their churches for a closing consecration service with their mentors and the church body to commemorate their commissioning as God’s ambassadors into the world.

5. Expected Outcomes and Evaluation

The focus of the *Passage* program is upon the formation—indeed, the transformation—of high school students. Therefore, our assessments will focus upon our high school students. However, as mentors from local churches, LETU students, staff, and faculty are also participating in the study, practices, and community, assessing these groups will be our secondary focus. We expect that high school students—and LETU students—who participate in the *Passage* program will be able to: 1) proclaim and explain the good news of the triune God’s reconciling love; 2) participate in God’s creation-wide mission through hearing, accepting, and inhabiting their callings to walk in the way of the Lord Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit; 3) possess the necessary theological resources and formative practices for faithful discipleship; 4) bring interdenominational and evangelical resources to bear on analyzing, critiquing, reforming and creating culture; and 5) serve the local churches by sharing what *Passage* has taught them about participating in the mission of God.

In order to assess the *Passage* program we will collect both qualitative and quantitative data. The quantitative data will be collected primarily through an online survey at the beginning and end of the year-long program for high school participants, mentors, and LETU students. At the heart of the survey will be questions measuring growth in the five goals and outcomes. In the after survey, these questions will be supplemented by questions regarding *Passage* program logistics and communication.

Alongside this quantitative assessment, we will also invite qualitative assessment in the following ways. First, we will ask the high school students, mentors, and LETU students for short application essays explaining their theological understanding of vocation. At the end of the program, we will ask them to revisit these essays and revise them in light of their *Passage* experience. Second, at the end of the mentor training, the *Passage* camp, and the reunion retreat, the co-directors and administrative assistant will each write a reflection on the event before meeting together to compile their reflections into a formal evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of that event and the opportunities and threats for the next iteration or event. Third, faculty stipends will require participating faculty to submit a one-page reflection upon how their development of curriculum or participation in the *Passage* program event has led to changes in their scholarship, teaching practices, or ministry in the local church. Finally, the Director of Outreach will be responsible for following up with mentors and local churches to receive informal feedback on the program and its impact on local churches.

Within eight weeks of the Reunion Retreat, the year-end assessments will be collected, compiled and reviewed. Within twelve weeks of the reunion retreat, the co-directors and administrative assistant will produce a five-page annual evaluation that measures the *Passage* program against its vision, mission, goals, and student outcomes. At the end of each fiscal year, the administrative assistant will also prepare a financial evaluation of the program. These documents will be used in the annual planning retreat to guide any revisions to the program, preparing our yearly and final report to the
Lilly Endowment, and supporting the School of Theology & Vocation’s ongoing support of the program as part of its annual operating budget, moving to 100% in 2020-2021.

6. Leadership

Direct connections between the faculty of the School of Theology & Vocation and the Passage program are crucial to its success. Therefore, the co-directors will be faculty members. Dr. Patrick Mays, Professor of Biblical Studies and Christian Ministry will serve as Director of Programming; Dr. Luke Ben Tallon, Associate Professor of Theology will serve as Director of Theology; and a new hire who will receive academic rank commensurate with his or her education and experience will serve as Director of Outreach. Dr. Mays and Dr. Tallon each will devote one-quarter of their work at LETU during the school year to Passage, and the Director of Outreach will devote one-half of his or her time to Passage. A new administrative assistant will provide secretarial and logistical support for the program.

Co-Directors

Director of Programming: Dr. Patrick Mays, Professor of Biblical Studies and Christian Ministry

Raised locally, Dr. Mays returned to the Ark-La-Tex region to join LETU’s faculty in 2003 with significant ministry experience that included youth work in Texas, Louisiana, and Alabama as well as missions in Asia and a four-year stint as an academic missionary in secular universities in Prague, Czech Republic. Dr. Mays’ current research takes him to Nigeria each summer to partner with The Seed Company, helping translate the Bible into local dialects through the Guest Bible Scholar program. He specializes in theology and intercultural studies.

As Director of Programming, Dr. Mays is responsible for logistics: planning the mentor retreat, staff training, Passage camp, reunion retreat, and acting as on-ground director of the week-long camp. Dr. Mays’s recent years as Chair of the Theology Department gave him campus-wide connections and experience managing a budget that will be invaluable for this logistical work. His long experience in youth ministry provided ample experience in planning spiritually formative events for high school students. His scholarship and teaching focus on increasing effectiveness in youth ministry, developing a missional focus in the church, and reaching post-Christian cultures. Finally, Dr. Mays has a rich knowledge of the culture and churches in the Ark-La-Tex area, along with an extensive personal network among East Texas pastors and youth pastors—especially within his denomination, the United Methodist Church.

Director of Theology: Dr. Luke Ben Tallon, Assistant Professor of Theology

Dr. Tallon became interested in a theological account of vocation and forming Christians to pursue their vocations faithfully while an M.Div. student at Pepperdine University during the Lilly-funded “Voyage” program for freshmen. Conversations with Dr. Richard Hughes about vocation coincided with courses on urban ministry and ancient Israel’s prophetic literature, leading to an on-going desire to develop theology and practices that do not assume vocations are limited to certain socio-economic or professional groups. Ultimately, the Lilly encounter was a factor that led to his Ph.D. thesis at the University of St. Andrews on the nature of human transformation with a focus on the relationship between God’s vocation and human invocation (prayer) through a study of Protestant, Eastern Orthodox, and Roman Catholic theology.

Dr. Tallon heard his call to teach while working as a backpacking guide at Wilderness Trek (a Christian camp that ministered to 1,200 high school students each summer) and serving in the campus ministry while at Pepperdine. Besides writing curriculum for Wilderness Trek and campus
ministry retreats, he has taught church classes in Scotland, California, Barbados, and Longview to ages from senior citizens to preschoolers. He teaches courses in Christian doctrine, ethics, and community development at LETU as well as working with his wife, Holly, as part-time discipleship ministers at their local church.

Dr. Tallon’s background and experience provide an excellent foundation for guiding the development of Passage’s curriculum. With almost two decades of youth and college ministry experience and a passion for educating the church’s youth, he is prepared to develop the curriculum for the week-long camp and the reunion.

Director of Outreach: New Hire in Biblical Studies or Practical Theology

When hiring the Director of Outreach, we will be searching for someone who loves meeting new people, has a pastoral heart, and is able to enter into theological discussion with people from a variety of educational, ecclesial, and socio-economic backgrounds. She or he will be able to affirm LETU’s statement of evangelical faith and our community standards as well as being committed to the global and historic church—including sharing life together with a local church. The ideal hire will have significant experience in both youth ministry and theological education, with the academic credentials needed to teach both introductory and specialized courses as a faculty member of the School of Theology and Vocation. The academic specialization is open, but he or she must be biblically and theological grounded. Someone raised in the Ark-La-Tex area would be an added bonus but is not a sine qua non.

The Director of Outreach will bear primary responsibility for working with churches and ministers to introduce Passage, recruit high school students and mentors, and gather feedback from these churches and ministers after Passage. This does not mean that the Director of Outreach has sole responsibility for these community contacts. Rather, he or she will lead and facilitate these connections for other faculty members in the School of Theology and Vocation.

Administrative Assistant: New Hire

The ideal administrative assistant will have a heart for high school and college students as well as experience in youth or college ministry. He or she will be able to affirm LETU’s statement of evangelical faith and our community standards as well as being committed to the global and historic church—including sharing life together with a local church. He or she will be team-oriented and proficient in Word, Excel, and Outlook—some experience in web-design or marketing would be a plus. As the initial point of contact for the Passage program, he or she should be friendly and warm, capable of communicating clearly and collegially. The administrative assistant will act as an assistant director of the day retreats and week-long camp, purchase supplies, coordinate Passage with other LETU departments and activities, manage databases of student applications and reservations as well as mentors and sponsoring churches, provide clerical support for the co-directors, help coordinate and reimburse travel, and keep the Passage budget for both LETU and Lilly.

LETU Theology Faculty and Administration

Dr. Aaron Kuecker, Dean of School of Theology and Vocation, Associate Professor of New Testament

Dr. Kuecker’s work in the New Testament has focused on the intersection between the Holy Spirit and the formation of identity, with an emphasis on the way the Spirit’s work results in group reconciliation. When LETU launched the School of Theology & Vocation in order to emphasize and develop a thoroughly Christian vision of vocation, Dr. Kuecker was selected as the Dean because of
his outstanding work forming students in the Honors College, his scholarship in service to the church, and his pastoral heart and experience as an ordained minister in the Reformed Church in America. He believes that LETU’s institutional emphasis upon vocation has excellent alignment with the aims of the Lilly initiative and looks forward to the opportunity to extend our work on Christian vocation to high school students.

Dr. Steven Mason, Assistant Provost & Dean of Faculty, Associate Professor of Old Testament

A native Texan, Dr. Mason’s academic work focuses on covenant in Christian scripture. An avid supporter of Young Life and an elder in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Steven is passionate about Christian education and discipleship on LETU’s campus and deeper engagement between the church and the academy.

Dr. Kelly Liebengood, Chief Global Initiatives Officer and Associate Professor of Biblical Studies

Dr. Liebengood’s administrative work spans both the campus and the globe as he represents LETU internationally and equips students to understand their faith in an increasingly multi-religious and globalized world. He has lived and worked in Chile, Egypt, Costa Rica, Scotland, and Italy, and leads international study trips each year. Dr. Liebengood’s academic and pastoral work have centered on the interface between the Bible, Christian theology, and vocation. Dr. Liebengood is senior pastor at One Hope Presbyterian Church in Longview, TX.

Dr. Wilson Cunha, Assistant Professor of Theology

With a Ph.D. in Old Testament from Leiden University in the Netherlands, Dr. Cunha came to LETU to teach Biblical Studies in 2011. Wilson grew up in São Paulo, Brazil, where he is an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church of Brazil (IPB). With a love for ancient languages and the history of reception and interpretation, Dr. Cunha views teaching as a way to participate in God’s mission in our world and as a way to call others to take their place in that mission—with a special emphasis on God’s concern for the poor and the oppressed.

Dr. Viktor Roudkovski, Associate Professor of Theology

Dr. Roudkovski was born and raised in the former Soviet republic of Kazakhstan. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, he came to USA to pursue his studies in scripture and theology. Dr. Roudkovski has taught for 10 years at LETU, bringing to the classroom both his academic expertise in Jesus and the gospels and his twelve years of experience pastoring local Baptist churches. Viktor coordinates our general education course introducing students to the grand drama of scripture and he delights to help students explore how Jesus’ teachings should inform our worship, life, and vocation.

New Hire, Practical Theology or Biblical Studies

This fall, LETU is advertising for a replacement position in practical theology or biblical studies. We do not know who he or she is yet, but we are confident that they will be a valuable addition to the Passage team, committed to evangelical, interdenominational theological education and Christian ministry.

LETU Students

LETU believes in its work of curricular and co-curricular formation of mature, Christian disciples. The curriculum at the heart of Passage derives from the two freshman-level theology classes all LETU students take, so LETU students have already been through this material and will be able to help the high school students (even as they go deeper into the material themselves). Likewise, the co-
curricular component of LETU education parallels Passage in many ways, so LETU students will be able to discuss how their own understandings of vocation have changed and how their own faithful responses have grown and deepened.

7. Partnerships

First, although the Passage proposal emerges directly from the School of Theology and Vocation, it came about only through the gracious cooperation of many LETU departments. We look forward to help from Residence Life, Facilities and Maintenance, Bon Appetit, and our colleagues in other departments as we flesh out what we have presented here in skeletal outline.

Second, local churches, denominational bodies, and Christian schools have proven very receptive to the Passage program proposal and have expressed desire to be included if and when it launches in 2016. The key role of these churches, denominations, and schools is 1) calling students and mentors, and 2) supporting the work that they undertake through Passage. Not everyone who has expressed support has written a letter, but we have included several from people who represent churches, denominations, and schools to indicate that Passage truly has appeal for evangelical churches across denominations. From Episcopal to Restoration Movement and from Methodist to Reformed, we believe that we are poised to go forward and achieve our relatively modest aims of fifty new students and mentors each year—a number that may be small compared to the million people living in the Ark-La-Tex region, but a number large enough to act as leaven for the whole lump!

8. Institutional Resources

As indicated above, LETU has an excellent School of Theology and Vocation, composed of both full-time teaching faculty and administrators fully dedicated to the vision and mission outlined above. While not marching in lock-step, this faculty is united in faith, has a common sense of purpose, and shares a rich collegial life that is discouragingly uncommon among theologians. Added to this is LETU’s beautiful campus which offers state of the art facilities: numerous classrooms, abundant dorm rooms, a new student center and recently renovated athletic facility, and a wonderful chapel just right for Passage. The cafeteria was also recently upgraded and Bon Appetite specializes in healthy and tasty meals, with an emphasis on local food and sustainability. Passage also takes advantage of LETU’s proximity to Caddo Lake, a gem amidst the Piney Woods.

LETU’s staff, especially in Residence Life and facilities are not only capable of supporting the Passage program, they also are committed to this work as ministry. For instance, Dr. Kristy Morgan, Dean of Students (PhD, Counseling and Student Development, Kansas State University) and Mr. Steve Conn, Assistant Dean of Student Life (MA, Higher Education, Taylor University), key partners in the Passage proposal, devote themselves to supporting LETU students in the development of habits, practices, and communities amenable to Christian flourishing. Dr. Morgan and Mr. Conn will lend their significant expertise, institutional support, and tangible links between the Passage program and Residence Life.

LETU’s location in south Longview also provides easy access to myriad service opportunities. Our area has higher child poverty, lower birthweights, and higher rates of domestic abuse than the national averages—and those are simply representative of small-town life in the Ark-La-Tex region. So, on the one hand, there are plenty of nearby off-campus service opportunities. On the other hand, bringing representative Ark-La-Tex high school students onto a highly-ranked, private Christian college campus may serve their families and communities by opening them up to a call from God to something outside of their normal experience. In sum, LETU’s location offers tremendous
opportunity for service and positive impact through a program like Passage that targets students from our region.

9. Anticipated Obstacles

LETU’s evangelical and interdenominational once skewed toward fundamentalism and has sometimes tended toward non-denominational and a-ecclesial. Of course non-denominational Christianity is welcome at LETU, but there is a tendency to attempt to avoid denominational conflict by simply amputating denominational traditions and distinctives. Likewise, in order to avoid thorny issues our constituency sometimes tends toward a purely individual conception of Christianity or a view of the church as simply an accommodation for individuals in need of encouragement on their way to heaven. These tendencies, if left unchecked would not insulate us from conflict, but they would cut us off from the riches of Christian traditions. They would also cut us off from God’s purposes to form a people—not merely to save individuals. While LETU now exhibits these tendencies much less frequently, their legacy is a rather anemic relation to local churches. Too many people in the Ark-La-Tex region do not know of LETU or do not understand its Christian mission. Of course, the Passage program is oriented to reaching out to the Ark-La-Tex region and overcoming this historical obstacle.

Another possible obstacle is raising funds for Passage from donors. While a denominational school can enter into churches in the denomination and ask for support as a form of supporting the denomination, LETU cannot. This makes it difficult to raise funds for the specifically theological dimension of our work. Added to this is our recent loss of our chief development officer, which made it difficult to contact donors for support of the Passage program. However, we anticipate that the success of Passage will engender congregational support and provide us with the relationships and track record that we would need to seek donors to help defray the cost of Passage. The success of the outreach, however, depends in part upon hiring the right Director of Outreach, and while we believe that we will receive a number of excellent applications, there is the possibility that a great candidate will not emerge. In that case, Dr. Tallon and Dr. Mays would redistribute responsibilities.

Another anticipated obstacle involve scheduling the three on-campus events in light of the many other events hosted by LETU. However, we are confident that this can be negotiated with an 18 month lead time—as allowed by our proposal timeline.

10. Long-Term Development

Our primary option is to identify a donor or group of donors who are committed to the mission and goals of Passage. We look forward to working with our new VP of Development and the Director of Outreach to identify these donors and begin how Passage will serve the Christian community.

Operating without definite commitment from friends of LETU for donations to support Passage, we have gone forward with provisional institutional support for building support of Passage into LETU’s annual budget. Given a) the amazing mission-fit between Lilly’s call and LETU’s mission and 2015-2020 Strategic Plan; b) the generous size of this grant, c) LETU’s slowly increasing financial responsibility over four years, and d) the four-year timeframe for building an exceptional and well-regarded camp, LETU is willing to take on financial responsibility for Passage. Of course, in the unlikely and unhoped for event that Passage fails to bring in around 50 new students onto campus each summer, LETU would have to re-evaluate Passage and consider a modified program going into year five and beyond. However, if Passage is able to reach 50 students, cultivate a new generation of Christian leaders, and improve our relationship with our neighbors, it has a lasting home at LETU.