



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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First fully endowed faculty chair established at AMBS

Elkhart, Ind. (AMBS) - The first fully endowed faculty position at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary reflects the vision and commitment of the donors, Mary Esther and Walter Schmid.

The newly established chair in Missional Leadership Development, named for the Orrville, Ohio, couple, has been created through contributions totaling \$1.5 million, given over a period of several years. The annual earnings will fund the salary and benefits of one full-time faculty member.

“This gift ensures that missional leadership development will have a significant presence in the faculty and curriculum in AMBS’s future,” Rebecca Slough, AMBS dean, said. “It provides support to the budget to open up new possibilities, and those will unfold as we continue to develop our resources and curriculum.”

The person teaching in the role is David B. Miller, who joined the AMBS faculty in 2009. He directs the work of students in internships, planning and overseeing their activities and evaluations to make sure they are growing as missional leaders.

“Because there is a person whose focus is dedicated to missional leadership,” Slough continued, “we are assured this is not only part of our teaching, but it also is a significant area of research that shapes what we offer to the church in resources and events.”

For the donors, involvement in the church was always a significant part of life. Mary Esther, who now lives at Smithville Western Commons, served in the Orrville Mennonite Church congregation as a Sunday school and Bible school teacher. Walter, who died in 1998, served as treasurer for Ohio Mennonite Conference. Their four children remember visiting mission churches in the conference on Sunday mornings when they were young.

The gift for missional leadership supports his parent’s vision and practical values, Steve Schmid, one of their sons, said. “They always desired that church leaders would encourage congregations to put their faith into action. The church is most vibrant when it is actively



serving the needs of the community. They are glad AMBS is devoting resources to this teaching. The result will be to turn faith into action.

“We as a family fully support our parents’ gift because we hope it will stimulate church leaders to lead congregations to be involved in their local, regional and global communities. Ministries must start at home and expand from there,” Steve added.

Walter spent most of his life working at and leading Smith Dairy. This company began in 1909 when his father and uncle entered the dairy business. Peter and John, the elder Schmidts, started with cans of milk and dippers, delivering milk to homes. Today Smith Dairy bottles milk and manufactures cottage cheese, ice cream and other products. Named Smith Dairy because their customers referred to them as the Smith brothers, the business reflects values important to the family: quality, service and caring for others as Jesus would. Walter led the organization for 30 years; a stroke in 1982 limited his ability to continue working. His two sons, Steve and John, are actively involved today.

With the couple’s lifelong commitment to the church and wanting to support people rather than construction projects, Mary Esther began making contributions toward the endowed faculty position in 2004. At that time, AMBS included aspects of church leadership in the curriculum, but there was no faculty position devoted specifically to this.

It was in 2008 that the seminary created a position in missional leadership to correspond to needs identified in the church. AMBS opened the search to fill that position and discerned that Miller was the best candidate. He was then serving as pastor of University Mennonite Church, State College, Pa., and is married to Mary, one of Walter’s and Mary Esther’s two daughters.

“Two independent streams were in motion,” Miller reflected, noting that the gift to AMBS had begun several years earlier and the invitation for him to apply for the position was not something he had sought.

Miller had previously taught in Hesston College’s Pastoral Ministries Program, and also had been a pastor of East Goshen (Ind.) Mennonite Church. He had a strong sense of vision and fulfillment in pastoring. However, after seeking counsel from others, Miller accepted the seminary’s call to join the faculty.

“The endowed chair will enable AMBS to dramatically influence church leaders for many years as God’s kingdom is strengthened around us,” Steve said, on behalf of the family, which also includes another sister, Barb Fridley of Elkhart.

