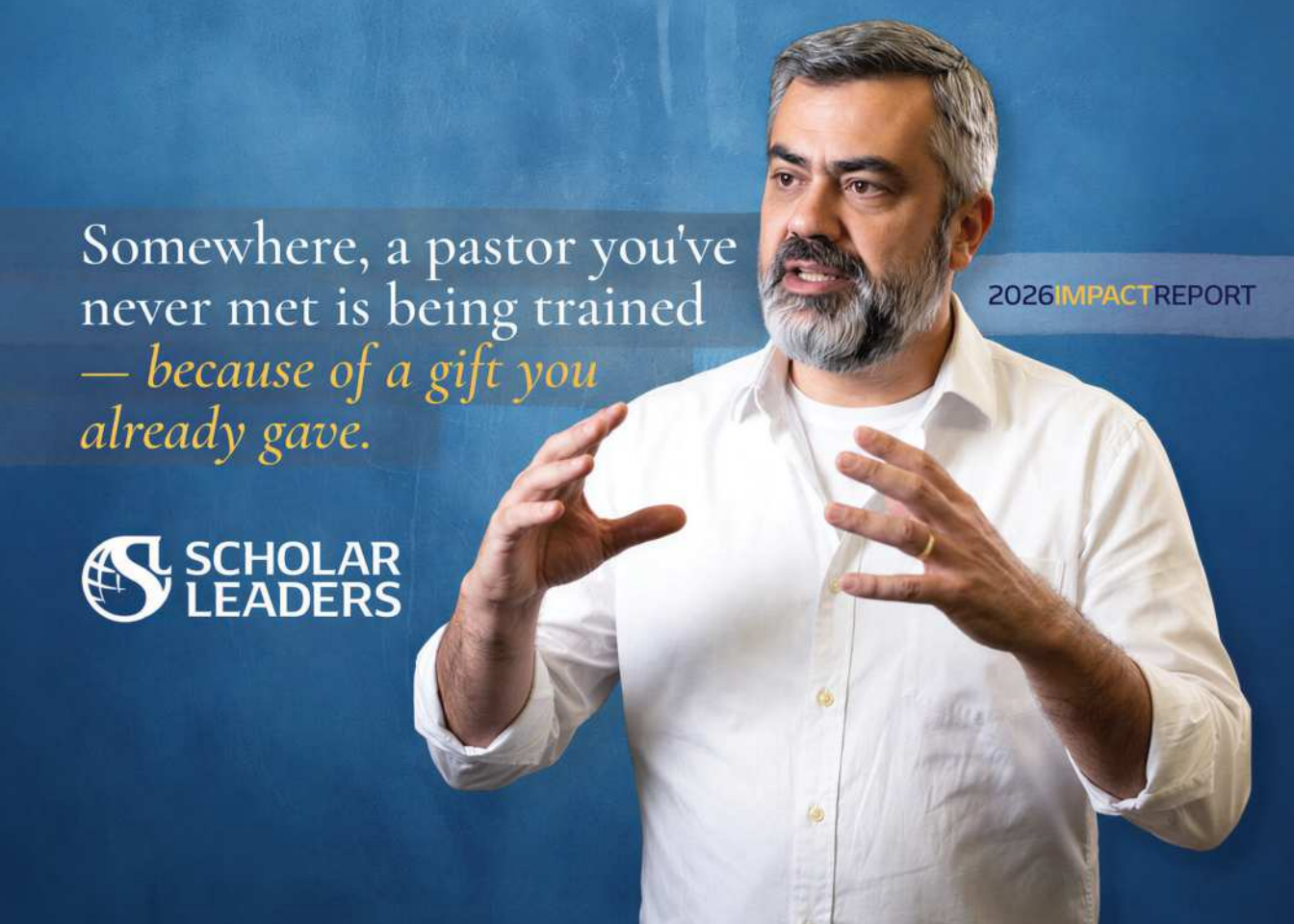
Somewhere, a pastor you've never met is being trained
— because of a gift you already gave.
SCHOLAR LEADERS
2026IMPACTREPORT

SCHOLAR LEADERS

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# PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

**Do you know what keeps our team energized year over year?**

***It's the knowledge that what we do works.***

For over four decades, Scholar Leaders has been talent scouting some of the most gifted Christian leaders from around the globe. These women and men are more than impressive brains—they are big-hearted believers who love God and neighbor with both their minds and their strength. Investing in the formation of this kind of leader has proven to have lasting, durable impact.

As you thumb through the following pages, you'll get a peek into the hearts of these leaders. You'll get to know César Lopes, a Brazilian theologian whose capacious vision is matched by the breadth of his smile, the strength of his conviction, and the reach of his school from Argentina to Mexico.

You'll also get a glimpse into what a decade of collaboration with seminary executives has produced, as our Vital Sustainability Initiative celebrates its 10th anniversary. And you'll read about how many of those seminaries' libraries have been infused with Christian wisdom through two decades of shipments from our Theological Book Network.

Many of those women and men started their relationship with Scholar Leaders through a scholarship. They demonstrate how an initial investment in a leader's education can begin a cascade of blessings for pastors and believers across the world.

Scholar-leaders like César are the real deal—Christian visionaries who can not only imagine how the Church might shine in the darkness but who themselves light matches, candles, and bonfires.

It all starts with a scholarship. But the impact of each of these Scholar Leaders reverberates far beyond one degree, one topic, or even one lifetime.

President, Scholar Leaders

# FROM **GRAND RAPIDS** TO **AFRICA** & BEYOND

— BOOKS BY VALUE & DESTINATION

THEOLOGICAL BOOK NETWORK

A Program of Scholar Leaders

— TOTAL BOOK VALUE

**$1,398,271**

— BOOKS SHIPPED*

**44,561**

— VALUE BY DESTINATION

**Ethiopia** $440,178.37

15,331 BOOKS

**Tanzania** $188,368.23

6,716 BOOKS

**Kenya** $376,382.66

14,184 BOOKS

**Tunisia** $84,079.49

2,617 BOOKS

**African Partners** $300,374.59

5,713 BOOKS

**SL Graduates** $8,887.76

## Filling the shelves that help shape the shepherds.

Because where the Church is growing, the library should be too.

# To Live for the Kingdom of God & Its Justice

Latin America is a land of extremes. It's the continent with the highest percentage of Christians in the world in relation to total population, warm with many vibrant cultural identities, yet deeply scarred by pervasive corruption, brutal violence, and abysmal economic disparity.

César Lopes knows these extremes all too well. For three decades now, he has served Latin America through theological education – not as an end in itself but as a means for the transformation of the people and communities he loves.

By: Juliany González Nieves

For him, theology is not an exercise in abstractions divorced from material realities. Rather, it is something done *from life* and *for life*. He believes that theology should help to clarify what it means for each believer – from the peanut seller in the streets of Guayaquil, Ecuador to the bi-vocational pastor serving internally displaced people in Medellín, Colombia – *to live for the kingdom of God and its justice*. That holy restlessness has pushed César since he was young to evaluate the status quo, whether in the church, school, or neighborhood; question it; and imagine more just and lifegiving possibilities.

Raised in a Roman Catholic household in Brazil, during his first year of an undergraduate program in engineering, César experienced a profound conversion that set him on a new path. Convinced of a calling to ministry, he abandoned engineering to pursue training at the South American Theological Seminary, a partner school of Scholar Leaders located in Londrina, Brazil.

At that time, the seminary was growing, but students were wrestling with a lack of contextualization in the curriculum. César says, "We called ourselves the South American Theological Seminary. However, our curriculum was North American." As a result, training didn't respond to the true challenges and opportunities of the Brazilian context. This problem drove the seminary to undergo a multi-year curriculum revision that led César to recognize the importance of education. He

recounts, "I was working in [SATS's] curriculum review process, but I didn't know anything about curriculum." This experience led him to pursue a PhD in Educational Studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (TEDS) with a scholarship from Scholar Leaders.

➛ Meet this year's new scholars at: **scholarleaders.org/26scholars.**

While the PhD equipped César with the tools that he needed to craft truly Latin American theological education, it was the international community he encountered within and beyond the classroom that was especially formative. In the classroom, his skills were sharpened. Outside, this global community became a place of belonging that he still enjoys. For example, he teaches almost every year at the Central American Theological Seminary (SETECA by its Spanish abbreviation) in Guatemala thanks to a friendship with another Scholar Leaders-supported student at TEDS.

## Today, César serves as President of the Comunidad de Estudios Teológicos Interdisciplinarios (CETI).

Grounded in the conviction that the gospel is not only good news for life after death but also for life before death, César guides the institution to train the leaders of local churches and Christian organizations so that they can help their communities be faithful followers of Christ wherever they are. One graduate, Lizandro Bravo, who ministers in the barrios in Ecuador, helped Christians read Scripture through CETI's "Vida y Misión" certificate. He facilitated conversations about the gospel and economics that catalyzed believers to start new businesses that use their talents "to

transform survival into practices of shared dignity," as César describes in a recent article.

Often in theological education, we talk about "impact" and about "formation and transformation." Those words can be hard to define and even harder to evaluate. But sometimes we see outstanding examples that bring these abstractions to reality – like César. His life of holy restlessness, of asking sharper questions, of cultivating richer relationships, of equipping bolder leaders has resulted in a Latin American Church more able to embody Christ in this land of extremes.

**For more resources by César, including a podcast interview, a recent article, and videos, visit: scholarleaders.org/cesar**

**Four women-led teams** are creating content to confront sexual abuse in Christian communities in the Middle East and North Africa, East and Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Latin America. Pictured here are two of the team leaders, Sofía Quintanilla and Grace Al-Zoughbi.

In 2026, Scholar Leaders supported **53** scholars from **31** countries.

Photo: Dr. Ivan Rusyn, President of UETS, with Dr. Denys Kondyuk, recent PhD graduate scholarshipped by Scholar Leaders.

**By: Evan R. Hunter**

As I walked across the campus of the Ukrainian Evangelical Theological Seminary (UETS) in August 2022, I stepped over a small crater. Glancing up, I saw windows shattered by shelling. I was heading with UETS's leadership team to the seminary's dining hall, and these were marks of their current "normal" life under Russian attack. In the dining hall, we sat with refugees who had fled their homes. Light poured through holes in the steel door that had been shredded by shrapnel.

While we ate, I thought back to my initial visit to UETS in 2016, when it was one of the first schools to join the Scholar Leaders Vital Sustainability Initiative (VSI). The young leadership team exuded passion as they shared a five-year plan – including new faculty, new programs, and new theological research – that would likely really require ten years to accomplish.

Astonishingly, I realized that the UETS team had indeed carried out much of that plan. Ivan Rusyn, UETS's President, explained that VSI had helped them develop skills that had allowed them not only to fulfill their ambitions but to do so while responding to crisis after crisis – first COVID, then the full-scale invasion. Ivan used the thinking that he had honed during the VSI process to stabilize the seminary and reorganize his team, making them more effective at managing new programs and caring for faculty and students under attack. They built processes for evaluating opportunities in light of their mission, for saying yes to what would make the institution more effective and no to what would distract.

So, that summer of 2022, I was at UETS to help them think about what would come next – even as the war continued. Taras Dyatlik, SL's Engagement Director, and I helped UETS prepare to create new programs in counseling and in chaplaincy. And again, three years later, as shells continued to fall, I sat in Ivan's office (now with new glass in its windows!) to prepare for the first-ever government-recognized PhD program in evangelical

Photo: Ukrainian leader Olga Marchak after two days of research collaboration meetings with SL staff in Lviv, Ukraine.

theology in all of the former U.S.S.R. As Ivan told us, "As it turned out, everything we did in VSI prepared us to act during the full-scale war." UETS is not only surviving this horrific season but is in fact growing to be even more fruitful.

**Half a world away from Ukraine, Colombo Theological Seminary (CTS) sits in the urban sprawl of Sri Lanka's capital city.**

Travel only a few miles outside of the city, and you'll be surrounded by hills covered with shimmering tea fields. You'll drive through small towns where posts with iron rings serve as hitching posts for elephants.

Sri Lanka is the birthplace of Theravada Buddhism, and Christians are a small minority there. But CTS's leaders are eager to see the Church flourish despite the pressures believers face. In 2017, the VSI team met with Ivor Poobalan, CTS's then-President, to help him craft a new strategic plan for the seminary. At that time Ivor had been leading CTS for nearly twenty years, so he had already helped train hundreds of thousands of pastors. However, in his booming voice, he told us that he believed that God had even greater opportunities for CTS.

Thanks to VSI, CTS developed ways to deliver education to full-time pastors scattered across Sri Lanka. Because these pastors are so loaded with responsibilities, they cannot leave their congregations, so CTS trains them online and in short intensives at "hubs" scattered across Sri Lanka, where they actually live and serve. CTS also developed a Master's in counseling and expanded training for children's ministry. Later, Ivor shared, "There is no doubt that the Vital Sustainability Initiative was a timely blessing to ensure that CTS maintains its missional trajectory."

In March 2026, after 28 years of service, Ivor passed the baton to Nathan Somanathan, who earned his PhD in Systematic Theology

with a scholarship from SL. As Nathan steers CTS into its future, we have already begun to come alongside him through another round of strategic planning in October 2026.

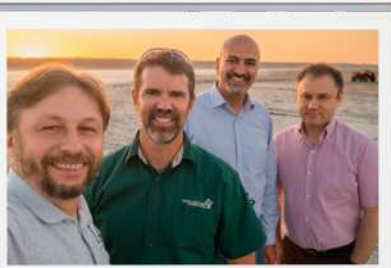
As these two stories illustrate, the goal of VSI is not to impose answers from the outside. Instead, we get to know each seminary's leadership team well, build true friendships with them, and then help them respond creatively, courageously, and faithfully to the opportunities and problems they encounter. Whether we are sitting in an office with plywood across bombed-out windows planning the next major step for evangelicalism in Eastern Europe, or sipping tea near a thriving banana grove while discussing how to help Christians live alongside Buddhists, we work to help seminaries train the next generations of pastors, teachers, counselors, and evangelists to guide the global Church to be more like Christ in some of the world's most challenging contexts.

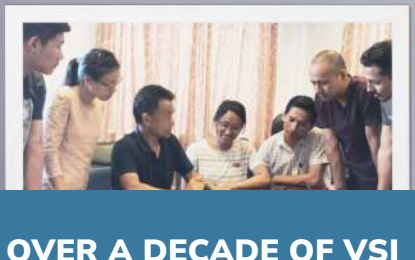
**To see more VSI related stories, visit our digital report at scholarleaders.org/impact26.**

## VSI IMPACT IN UKRAINE

**IN THE DAYS FOLLOWING THE RUSSIAN INVASION:**

- **3** research teams were equipping the church for wartime ministry
- **10** seminary hubs were coordinating relief
- Nearly **500,000** people were cared for
- **New** regional alliance of seminaries was formed





## OVER A DECADE OF VSI

# THE TEAM

**Christopher M. Hays, DPhil**
*President*

**Evan R. Hunter, PhD**
*Executive Vice President*

**Marcos Orison de Almeida, PhD**
*Vice President*

**Evelyn Fearing, PhD**
*Vice President*

**Daniel DeWitt, PhD**
*Creative Director*

**Lyndon Drake, DPhil, PhD**
*Consulting Director for AI & Digital Innovation*

**Taras Dyatlik**
*Engagement Director*

**Susy Estrada**
*Admarcoms Intern*

**Juliany González Nieves**
*Media Manager*

**Tatiana Mejia Isaza**
*BiblioTech*

**Luz Mestra**
*Executive Assistant to the President*

**Wageeh Mikhail, PhD**
*Director of Engagement with Islam*

**Kaylie Nieboer**
*Church Engagement Coordinator; Administration*

**Daniel Owens, PhD**
*Consultant for Southeast Asia*

**Ginna Rocío Ruiz Sierra**
*BT Studio Administration*

**Rolin Timmerman**
*Warehouse Manager, Theological Book Network*

**Darshak Toma**
*Theological Book Network*

**Jeri Watson**
*Administration*

**Scott Watson**
*Director of Acquisitions, Theological Book Network*

# PUBLISHING PARTNERS

BakerBooks

Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Ediciones Puma

fp

editorial Kairós

Langham Publishing

ivp

regnum

SBL SBL Press

Zondervan

# OUR BOARD

## § Governing Board

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Nina Balmaceda, PhD

Mark Conroe

Clair Fung

Scott Gifford

Beth Paul, PharmD

Steve Sawyer

Syman Stevens, DPhil

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David Fung

John Lovewell

Doug Paul, PharmD, PhD

Linda Prinn

Marshall Reavis

Meritt Sawyer

Scot Sellers

Dennis Sheehan, MD

Debbie & David West

Mike Woodruff

## § Founders

Tom Cooper

Steve Hayner, PhD (RIP)

Mark Labberton, PhD

## § Emeriti

Gary Ames (RIP)

Kerry Dearborn, PhD, & Tim Dearborn, PhD

Walter Liefeld, PhD (RIP)

Doug McConnell, PhD

Paul Pierson, PhD

Brian Prinn (RIP)

Victoria & Larry Smith, Former President

JOIN OUR PRAYER COMMUNITY:
SCHOLARLEADERS.ORG/GET-INVOLVED

SCHOLAR LEADERS

| INCOME | 2026 | 2025 |
|---|---|---|
| Individuals | $636,708 | $547,716 |
| Churches | $157,045 | $87,540 |
| Legacy Fund contributions | $360,792 | $61,508 |
| Foundations | $2,058,278 | $1,712,859 |
| New & released restrictions* | $368,878 | $668,005 |
| Transfers from Legacy Funds** | $125,478 | $125,478 |
| Book donations | $1,824,288 | $620,997 |
| Interest and fees | $150,976 | $102,407 |
| **Total Income** | **$5,682,443** | **$3,926,510** |

| EXPENDITURES | 2026 | 2025 |
|---|---|---|
| Programs | $2,773,551 | $2,880,957 |
| Books placed into service | $1,209,903 | $583,999 |
| Books placed into inventory for future use | $614,385 | $36,998 |
| Strategy and administration | $301,399 | $257,886 |
| Advancement | $225,789 | $224,271 |
| Legacy Funds deposited | $360,792 | |
| Strategic Initiative Fund | $170,473 | |
| **Total Expenditure** | **$5,656,292** | **$3,984,111** |

* Negative indicates net funds reserved for future ministry use.

** Legacy funds are amortized on a fixed schedule, between 5-20 years, according to donor intent.

Fiscal year ends August 31.
Audited financials available upon request.

| | 2026 | 2025 |
|---|---|---|
| Net Current Assets (Year-End) | $7,168,614 | $6,612,713 |
| Unrestricted Assets | $5,424,133 | $4,751,339 |
| Legacy Funds | $986,391 | $734,406 |
| Restricted Assets | $758,090 | $1,126,968 |

**Count the blessings with us. The numbers are worth celebrating!**

SCHOLAR LEADERS

Check out our interactive, multi-media impact report:
scholarleaders.org/impact26

Photo: Georgina Kwanima Boateng, from Ghana, is a new scholarship recipient.