



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Dec. 9, 2016

Contact: Judith Cebula
317.916.7327| cebulaj@lei.org

New Initiative to Help Congregations Find New Ways to Engage and Support Young Adults

INDIANAPOLIS – Lilly Endowment Inc. is launching a \$19.4 million initiative to help congregations engage young adults and work with them to design innovative ministries that support and enrich their religious lives.

“Religious leaders long to connect with young adults, but many acknowledge that few young people in their 20s are making their way into congregational life,” said Christopher L. Coble, the Endowment’s vice president for religion. “These church leaders are looking for new and fresh ways to build relationships with young people.”

The Young Adult Initiative will support the establishment of innovation hubs at 12 colleges, universities and seminaries around the nation to help congregations design and launch new ministries with young adults, ages 23 to 29. The organizations are located in 10 states and the District of Columbia and reflect diverse Christian traditions – Mainline Protestant, evangelical and historic African American denominations, as well as Roman Catholic, Orthodox and independent congregations.

Each innovation hub will identify 12 to 24 congregations and help them better understand the experiences of young adults and work with them to create new ministries. The hubs will provide congregations with grants of up to \$30,000 to fund the design, launch and evaluate new ministries. They also will gather leaders for mutual learning and support.

At the heart of this initiative is a commitment to help faith communities transform the ways they think about young adults and how they respond to their spiritual needs.

“Congregations can easily slip into old practices of ministry that are unhelpful or even push away young adults rather than engage them and draw them into ministry and service opportunities,” said Coble. “A significant part of this work will focus on helping congregational leaders understand young adulthood today and the changing contexts that shape what young adults value and expect.”

Through its grantmaking, the Endowment has supported multiple research studies and programmatic opportunities to learn about and enrich the religious lives of young people. With grants from the Endowment, the National Study of Youth and Religion at the University of Notre Dame has since 2002 completed a longitudinal study documenting the religious beliefs, attitudes and spiritual practices of a national group of young people as they have entered adulthood. Since

1998, the Endowment has awarded grants to more than 300 colleges and universities, campus ministries and theological schools across the country to support programs that help high school youth, college students and young adults discover how God is calling them to meaningful careers, including careers in ministry.

These efforts have revealed that young adults in their 20s:

- Long for spaces to explore questions of identity and purpose
- Are willing to tap into theological traditions as they make life-defining choices about work, friendship, family and service to others
- Value relationships with peers and mentors as they seek religious nourishment and support for understanding their religious identities
- Desire self-sufficiency and religious experiences that reflect personal convictions and diverse cultural, political, social and theological perspectives
- Yearn to be part of communities that gather beyond the perceived boundaries of a local church

“Religious leaders are searching for new ways to engage young adults and enrich the spiritual lives of this emerging generation. It is among their highest priorities,” Coble said. “The Young Adult Initiative is designed to help them meet the challenge.”

As part of the initiative, the Endowment is making a grant to the Indianapolis Center for Congregations to support a five-year coordination project. It will regularly convene leaders of the innovation hubs to foster shared learning and help them continue to support and learn from their partner congregations.

The following organizations are receiving grants through the Young Adult Initiative:

Augsburg College, Minneapolis, MN - \$1,496,533
Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Austin, TX - \$1,499,263
Denver Seminary, Littleton, CO - \$1,500,000
Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA - \$1,500,000
Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, IL - \$1,500,000
Hellenic College, Inc., Brookline, MA - \$1,500,000
Indianapolis Center for Congregations Inc., Indianapolis, IN - \$1,571,000
Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, GA - \$1,500,000
Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ - \$1,500,000
Saint Meinrad Archabbey, St. Meinrad, IN - \$1,380,620
Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, WA - \$1,499,826
Trinity International University, Deerfield, IL - \$1,500,000
Wesley Theological Seminary of the United Methodist Church, Washington, DC - \$1,500,000

About Lilly Endowment Inc.

Lilly Endowment Inc. is an Indianapolis-based private philanthropic foundation created in 1937 by three members of the Lilly family - J.K. Lilly Sr. and sons J.K. Jr. and Eli - through gifts of stock in their pharmaceutical company. The Endowment is committed to causes of religion, education and community development. Its religion grantmaking is primarily focused on initiatives to enhance and sustain the quality of Christian ministry in American congregations.

