

# Lilly Endowment Makes Grants to Help Pastors Thrive in Congregational Leadership



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NEWS RELEASE

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INDIANAPOLIS - Through its Thriving in Ministry initiative, Lilly Endowment Inc. has approved nearly \$70 million in grants to 78 [organizations](#) across the United States to help support pastors in congregational ministry. The grants are funding organizations to help clergy thrive as pastoral leaders so they can lead the congregations they serve more effectively.

Through Thriving in Ministry, organizations will create or strengthen programs that support pastors by helping them build relationships with other clergy who can serve as role models and mentors and guide them through key leadership challenges in congregational ministry.

"Leading a congregation today is multi-faceted and exceptionally demanding," said Christopher L. Coble, the Endowment's vice president for religion. "Pastors have shared with us that they often find themselves isolated from colleagues and sometimes struggle to keep up with new challenges posed by today's rapid pace of change. When pastors have opportunities to build relationships with experienced colleagues, they are able to understand and negotiate new challenges and their leadership thrives. These promising programs will help pastors develop these kinds of relationships, especially when they are in the midst of significant professional transitions."

Nearly 590 organizations submitted proposals in this highly competitive initiative, which the Endowment launched in January. More than 40 percent of the submitted proposals came from organizations that had never before submitted a grant proposal to the Endowment.

Located in 29 states, the organizations receiving the grants include theological schools, faith-based colleges and universities, congregations, denominational agencies, independent religious organizations and religious communities that reflect diverse Christian traditions: mainline and evangelical Protestant, Roman Catholic and Orthodox. They include organizations rooted in historically African American Christian traditions and those dedicated to serving Latino Christian communities and Asian Christian communities.

Thriving in Ministry builds upon recent studies that have examined the importance of colleagues and mentors who help pastors face and overcome common professional and personal challenges. These studies include research from the Endowment-funded Flourishing in Ministry project, directed by Matt Bloom at the University of Notre Dame.

The funded programs will support pastors serving congregations in particular ministry settings and at key moments in their professional careers. For example:

- A theological school will help new pastors serving congregations in marginalized communities create a vision for their ministries by meeting monthly with experienced pastors.
- A university will support rural pastors new to their ministries by helping them form mentoring relationships with experienced pastors and consult with experts about issues facing rural communities.
- An independent religious organization will support women clergy serving in the first years of ministry and women serving in their first three years as senior pastors with leadership resources and mentors.
- A congregation will build connections among pastors across a large metropolitan region so they can support one another and work together toward positive social change and reconciliation in the city.
- A national denomination will gather pastors serving multi-ethnic/multi-lingual congregations, church planters and those in transition from one ministry context to another in mentoring communities to explore leadership challenges.

The grants vary in amount – from \$31,500 to \$ 1 million. The programs they fund will vary in length - from two years to five years.

In addition to funding these 78 programs in Thriving in Ministry, the Endowment has made a \$2.6 million grant to Duke University to provide resources and other support to organizations in the initiative. Duke will convene program leaders for mutual learning and networking. Also, Duke will glean insights about the programs and share those insights widely with religious leaders who are responsible for the care of clergy and congregations.

Strengthening pastoral leadership in Christian congregations has been a grantmaking priority of the Endowment for nearly 25 years. Endowment-funded programs and initiatives have helped pastors make the critical transition from seminary student to pastoral leader; encouraged pastors to form peer learning groups for ongoing professional and personal support; helped theological schools in their efforts to prepare seminarians to lead congregations; and provided grants to congregations to enable pastors to step away from the daily demands of pastoral leadership for a period of renewal.

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**[Lilly Endowment Inc.](#)** is a national, private philanthropic foundation created in 1937 by three members of the Lilly family – J.K. Lilly Sr. and sons Eli and J.K. Jr. – through gifts of stock in their pharmaceutical business, Eli Lilly and Company. While those gifts remain the financial bedrock of the Endowment, the Endowment is a separate entity from the company, with a distinct governing board, staff and location. In keeping with the founders' wishes, the Endowment supports the causes of community development, education and religion. The Endowment maintains a special commitment to its hometown, Indianapolis, and home state, Indiana. Its grantmaking in religion focuses on supporting efforts to strengthen the leadership and vitality of Christian congregations throughout the country and to increase the public's understanding of the role of religion in public life.