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## **ILIFF SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY RECEIVES ONE MILLION DOLLAR GRANT FROM LILLY ENDOWMENT INC.**

DENVER, CO. – Iliff School of Theology has received a grant of \$1 Million from Lilly Endowment Inc. to help establish the Congregational Connections Program.

The project is being funded through Lilly Endowment’s Pathways for Tomorrow Initiative. It is a three-phase initiative designed to help theological schools across the United States and Canada as they prioritize and respond to the most pressing challenges they face as they prepare pastoral leaders for Christian congregations both now and into the future.

The Congregational Connections Program was built from the results of a market research study funded by Phase One of Lilly Endowment’s Pathways for Tomorrow Initiative. These findings indicated that congregational leaders are looking for additional training in practical skills, especially in terms of leading conversations and responses around difficult social issues within their congregations. The respondents also expressed a need for a collaborative network to connect with other church leaders to learn, grow, and build together with other congregations.

To meet the needs documented in the research, Iliff’s Congregational Connections Program will create a Congregational Connections App to provide low-cost educational content and peer mentoring for existing congregational leaders, will ensure that students have access to “practical application” courses along with their academic discourse, and will also host a weekly session for invited congregations to attend, in full, to worship together and to learn how to converse about and heal divisions both inside and outside their congregations. By partnering with local congregations and their leaders, Iliff hopes to provide tools that help to strengthen the local faith community through educational resources and by facilitating connections between congregations in meaningful ways. As theological education continues to evolve and change, Iliff is committed to remaining accessible in meeting the emerging and diverse needs of our students, alumni, pastoral and congregational lay leaders, and community.

"We are very grateful to Lilly Endowment for this grant and the opportunity to engage congregations in discovering a new vitality marked by a reclaiming of their essence as they express new forms of purposeful ministry," said Iliff President Rev. Dr. Thomas V. Wolfe. "As Iliff is a graduate school that is committed to cultivating compassion and justice through courageous imagination, I am confident that this grant will contribute to the shared deepening of these communities and our students in their roles as activists, servant leaders, and innovators in diverse religious, secular, and academic communities."

Iliff is one of 84 theological schools that are receiving a total of more than \$82 million in grants through the second phase of the Pathways initiative. Together, the schools represent evangelical, mainline Protestant, nondenominational, Pentecostal, Roman Catholic and Black church and historic peace church traditions (e.g., Church of the Brethren, Mennonite, Quakers). Many schools also serve students and pastors from Black, Latinx, Korean American, Chinese American and recent immigrant Christian communities.

"Theological schools have long played a pivotal role in preparing pastoral leaders for churches," said Christopher L. Coble, the Endowment's Vice President for Religion. "Today, these schools find themselves in a period of rapid and profound change. Through the Pathways Initiative, theological schools will take deliberate steps to address the challenges they have identified in ways that make the most sense to them. We believe that their efforts are critical to ensuring that Christian congregations continue to have a steady stream of pastoral leaders who are well-prepared to lead the churches of tomorrow."

Lilly Endowment launched the Pathways initiative in January 2021 because of its longstanding interest in supporting efforts to enhance and sustain the vitality of Christian congregations by strengthening the leadership capacities of pastors and congregational lay leaders.

#### **About Lilly Endowment Inc.**

[Lilly Endowment Inc.](#) is an Indianapolis-based private philanthropic foundation created in 1937 by J.K. Lilly, Sr. and his sons Eli and J.K. Jr. through gifts of stock in their pharmaceutical business, Eli Lilly and Company. Although the gifts of stock remain a financial bedrock of the Endowment, it 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](#) and maintains a special commitment to its founders' hometown, Indianapolis, and home state, Indiana. The primary aim of its grantmaking in religion, which is national in scope, focuses on strengthening the leadership and vitality of Christian congregations in the United States. The Endowment also seeks to foster public understanding about religion and lift up in fair, accurate and balanced ways the contributions that people of all faiths and religious communities make to our greater civic well-being.

#### **About Iliff**

Founded in 1892, the Iliff School of Theology is an independent, graduate school that is recognized nationally and internationally for its emphasis on justice, diversity, and ethics. As one of the leading theological schools in the nation, Iliff offers a progressive and diverse community that is supportive, inclusive, and transformative for students. For more information, visit: [www.iliff.edu](http://www.iliff.edu).

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