

## Press Release

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The Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ has received a \$1.25M grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. to help establish congregational vitality during times of pastoral transition.

The project is being funded through Lilly Endowment's Thriving Congregations Initiative. The aim of the initiative to encourage the flourishing of congregations by helping them deepen their relationships with God, enhance their connections with each other, and contribute to the vitality of their communities and the world.

We believe we can make a substantive difference in the lives of congregations during one of the most fragile seasons of their lives. In our congregational polity, when a pastor leaves a congregation, the congregation has an opportunity to re-evaluate their mission and re-discover how God might be calling them to make a difference in their communities. However, the realities of the church in a post-COVID age amplify the normal anxiety of a congregation in transition and a sense of hopelessness can easily slip in.

As a regional judicatory body, the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ already help congregations in transition, but this grant will allow us to significantly amplify the targeted services these congregations need. In addition to direct support of congregations currently in transition, we will be building a library of resources and building partnerships that will continue to help congregations well beyond the life of this grant.

As our Conference Minister, Rev. Molly Carlson says, "We are excited about the possibilities this grant will allow us to explore. We know that we share Lilly Endowment's commitment to the importance of the local church and look forward to this new way to partner for a better world."

The Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ is one of 105 organizations that has received grants through a competitive round of the Thriving Congregations Initiative. Reflecting a wide variety of Christian traditions, the organizations represent mainline Protestant, evangelical, Catholic, Orthodox, peace church and Pentecostal faith communities.

"Congregations play an essential role in deepening the faith of individuals and contributing to the vitality of communities," said Christopher L. Coble, Lilly Endowment's vice president for religion. "We hope that these programs will nurture the vibrancy and spark the creativity of congregations, helping them imagine new ways to share God's love in their communities and across the globe."

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

Lilly Endowment Inc. is a private 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. While those gifts remain the 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 hometown, Indianapolis, and home state, Indiana. A principal aim of the Endowment's religion grantmaking is to deepen and enrich the lives of Christians in the United States, primarily by seeking out and supporting efforts that enhance the vitality of congregations and strengthen the pastoral and lay leadership of Christian communities. The Endowment also seeks to improve public understanding of diverse religious traditions by supporting fair and accurate portrayals of the role religion plays in the United States and across the globe.