



An Introduction to the Journeying Together in Christ Grant from Lilly Endowment

As we announced earlier this month, the South Dakota Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has been awarded a grant of over \$1.1 million from Lilly Endowment Inc. through its Thriving Congregations Initiative.

The grant will be used by the Synod to live fully its vision of “Journeying Together in Christ,” by relating to congregations with intentionality, equipping leaders for ministry, networking across the church, and advocating for shared leadership, especially among our rural congregations.

The Synod developed the work of this initiative in response to three critical questions posed by Bishop Constanze Hagmaier and her staff in 2019 at statewide “Listen, Learn and Care” events: “What gives you joy?” and “What keeps you up at night?” and “How will we journey together?” One person’s poignant response resonated deeply: South Dakota ELCA churches are struggling with “fitting who we are into pews made for who we were.”

This grant will be used in two focus areas. First, it will be used to engage both lay and rostered congregational leaders by leveraging digital technologies to create *Connect*, a Synod-wide community hub for learning, resources and conversation. Next, it will be used to engage congregations with innovative Rural Immersion Ministries which will create congregational learning experiences designed to recognize and bridge the rural/urban cultural divide.

These projects are being funded through Lilly Endowment’s Thriving Congregations Initiative. The aim of the initiative is 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.

The work of this grant award will be closely aligned with the Synod’s existing and emerging resources, expertise, and experience. However, it is important to note that this grant is funding **work outside of the 2024 Mission Plan approved by the 2023 Synod Assembly. Therefore, it is critical that congregations and organizations continue their mission support to the South Dakota Synod to ensure that the regular and essential work of the Synod continues.**

If you would like to find out more about the work that the grant award will enable, there will be two virtual informational meetings on **Tuesday, January 9, 2024** that will be open to all members of the South Dakota Synod to attend - one at **12:30pm CT** and one at **7:30pm CT**. Both sessions will include time for attendees to ask questions about the grant. More information on how to attend these meetings will be provided in the Synod’s weekly e-newsletter and the Synod website (www.sdsynod.org).