

Transcript of Bishop Hagmaier's Intro Video on Grant from Lilly Endowment, Inc.

Dear South Dakota Synod,

Grace and peace to you in the name of the Word Made Flesh, Jesus Christ.

When I began my term in the Fall of 2019, I and other Synod staff members held "Listen, Learn, and Care" events across the South Dakota Synod. In each of these events, our conversations were guided by three critical questions: "What gives you joy?", "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."

The answers to these questions shaped our Synod's vision for my time as your bishop, "Journeying Together in Christ," which has guided our conversations and decisions as a Synod the past several years. It also guided your Synod staff as we wrote a proposal for a grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. through its Thriving Congregations Initiative. When we submitted that application earlier this year, we didn't know what the outcome would be, but we were hopeful that Lilly would understand this vision and view our proposal favorably.

Now, I am pleased and grateful to be able to share with you the news that Lilly has awarded our Synod a grant of over 1.1 million dollars from Lilly Endowment Inc. through its Thriving Congregations Initiative.

Now, these funds will not be used to create some fund to grant every wish I or the Synod staff have, but to fund two focus areas of ministry based on the answers we heard in these sessions four years ago, and the needs we heard as we have worked with the worshipping communities of this synod during my time as your bishop.

First, we will engage the ministry sites of the SD Synod by using a digital platform to create Connect, a synod-wide community hub for e-learning, resources, and community building. Next, we will accompany congregations through two complimentary rural-immersion ministries. First,

as an expansion of the Synod's rural ministry liaison program, leaders will visit SD's rural churches in transition to hear the story of the congregation while strengthening lay leadership. Second, to help bridge the urban-rural divide, we will place seminary students within rural congregations for a few weeks so that they can experience the joys and challenges of rural ministry.

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](http://www.sdsynod.org)). And, as always, you can contact the Synod office with any questions or concerns you may have.

I look forward to sharing more information about this grant with you in the new year. Until then, have a blessed Christmas season and happy New Year.