



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF IOWA

225 37th Street, Des Moines, IA 50312
(515) 277-6170
iowaepiscopal.org

Contact: The Reverend Canon Meg Wagner, Program Director
mwagner@iowaepiscopal.org
December 4, 2023

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Episcopal Diocese of Iowa has received a \$1,250,000 grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. to help establish the Regional Mission Initiative.

The project is 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 Regional Mission Initiative (RMI) is an immersive program to support and strengthen Episcopal lay and clergy leadership in small churches to address the challenges facing our shrinking rural communities in Iowa. Working intensively with eight congregations each in three geographic areas of our state, three area missioners will each gather members in a cohort of mutual learning and support. Cohorts will engage with rich theological formation and spiritual practices, alongside community organizing methods, and asset-based community development. They will draw on data-driven research and learning modules developed at Iowa State University as part of the Rural Shrink Smart Initiative funded by the National Science Foundation (ruralshrinksmart.org) and other tools to build new partnerships to strengthen the networks of relationships, interactions, and resources within the community.

The RMI is a hope-filled path to meeting a real and pressing need for Episcopal small and rural churches and communities. By the end of the four-year initiative congregations will have a clear plan for ongoing and sustainable leadership in line with their vision and mission in the community, they will have built deep connections with community partners to invest in the health and welfare of their towns, and hopefully additional missional communities in between existing Episcopal churches will have been identified and/or established.

"We believe that this Thriving Congregations grant is essential for the long-term sustainability of our small rural churches and will deepen their capacity to be strong and faith-filled community partners in their towns, and beyond that, could be a useful model for transformation for congregations in small towns across the United States," said the Rt. Rev. Betsey Monnot, Bishop of Iowa.

The Episcopal Diocese of Iowa 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."



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF IOWA

225 37th Street, Des Moines, IA 50312
(515) 277-6170
iowaepiscopal.org

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.