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Lilly Endowment Grant Supports Texas Conference Parish Project

The Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church has received a \$1.25 Million grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. to help establish The Parish Project, a congregational cohort-based learning program.

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 are grateful for this generous gift and eager to begin the work that will bring renewed energy to the Conference and its churches," Texas Annual Conference Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey said. "We are honored that the Lilly Endowment has made such a substantial investment in our future."

Rev. Deborah Hawboldt, Director of the Center for Leadership Formation at the Texas Annual Conference, said that the Parish Project was inspired by John Wesley's belief that the whole world is his parish. She explained that the vitality of congregations is intertwined with the health of its parish or community.

The Parish Project will group congregations together in cohorts, initially gathered by geography later by missional congruence, to design and practice new understanding of congregational vitality.

Congregations participating in the Parish Project will have an opportunity to apply for seed money to start new outward-focused ministries.

"Too often, congregations are unable to take risks because of financial constraints," Rev. Hawboldt said. "We believe that investing in their work will be an investment in the Kingdom." "We are now dreaming about how we can impact the entire Conference with this gift," Rev. Hawboldt said. "We begin with individual congregations that can then spread through the Conference and foster Conference full of healthy and thriving churches."

"This is good news not just inside our churches but outside churches as well," Hawboldt added. "We believe this will create the conditions for risk-taking, imagination-expanding and resilient ministry within the Texas Annual Conference that transforms the Church and the world."

The Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church 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.

About The Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church

Headquartered in Houston, The Texas Annual Conference is a regional body of the United Methodist Church and is overseen by Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey. It is the original Annual Conference in Texas and one of 13 conferences in the South Central Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church. The Texas Annual Conference provides leadership support to over 300 churches, several Wesley Foundations and higher education institutions, and an array of ministries and outreach organizations.