

# United Seminary in Minn. receives \$1M grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. to establish Leadership Center for Social Justice

ST. PAUL, MINN., UNITED STATES, December 2, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities](#) has received a grant of \$1,000,000 from [Lilly Endowment Inc.](#) to help establish a [Leadership Center for Social Justice](#) that will prepare pastoral leaders to involve their congregations strategically in constructive actions that move their communities toward holistic justice.

The project is being funded through Lilly Endowment's Pathways for Tomorrow Initiative. It is a three-phase initiative designed to help theological schools across the United States and Canada as they prioritize and respond to the most pressing challenges they face as they prepare pastoral leaders for Christian congregations both now and into the future.

Located in the heart of the Twin Cities -- the epicenter for racial justice that has spiraled out to the whole nation -- United is in a unique position to recognize how pastors are being asked to do things in public witness, congregational education, strategic communication, and constructive partnerships in their communities that their seminary education most likely did not prepare them to do. Congregational life is shifting, and United understands our time requires a new level of engagement with civic partners, other congregations, and other ways of faith. At the Leadership Center for Social Justice, issues of social justice beyond racial reconciliation, such as ecological practices, gender inclusion, and economic disparities, will be addressed to help churches be deemed relevant in a rapidly secularizing culture.

"Clergy have been clamoring for ways to bring their skills up to date to respond to the particular challenges of the times we live in and for support in their ministries," said Rev. Dr. Justin Sabia-Tanis, assistant professor and program director for Social Transformation. "This grant provides an opportunity for us to further equip, inspire, and empower religious leaders to engage in new



**UNITED**  
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
OF THE TWIN CITIES

*Education for Transformation*



Entrance to the campus of United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities



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*Rev. Dr. Molly T. Marshall,  
Interim President*

and innovative social change projects. This will also allow us to study how social justice work intersects with church vitality. The most important aspects of this, however, are the positive impacts on wellbeing that will take place in the communities these pastors serve and the deepening spirituality of their congregants as they live out their faith in concrete and meaningful ways.”

“We at United are grateful for what Lilly Endowment inspires us to do,” said Interim President Rev. Dr. Molly T. Marshall. “Receiving this grant will allow us to make a significant impact on the social landscape as pastoral

leaders receive preparation to lead their congregations in the work of social justice.”

The work of this project is part of United's DNA and it builds on the foundational work of alum Rev. Dr. Steve Newcom ('80, '19) who served as United's program director for Social Transformation and was the founding director of the Kaleo Center for Faith, Justice, and Social Transformation. United is grateful for the vision that Rev. Dr. Newcom had and the contributions it made to United's curriculum. The seminary looks forward to the ways in which this grant will help us continue this work. Under the leadership of Rev. Dr. Justin Sabia-Tanis (program director for Social Transformation and faculty for Social Transformation and Christian Ethics) and Rev. Dr. Gary Green II (faculty for Social Transformation and Pastoral Theology), United will focus next on building a continuing education program for pastors who desire training and education in leading congregations to become change-agents for justice in their communities.

United is one of 84 theological schools that are receiving a total of more than \$82 million in grants through the second phase of the Pathways initiative. Together, the schools represent evangelical, mainline Protestant, nondenominational, Pentecostal, Roman Catholic and Black church and historic peace church traditions (e.g., Church of the Brethren, Mennonite, Quakers). Many schools also serve students and pastors from Black, Latino, Korean American, Chinese American and recent immigrant Christian communities.

“Theological schools have long played a pivotal role in preparing pastoral leaders for churches,” said Christopher L. Coble, the Endowment's vice president for religion. “Today, these schools find themselves in a period of rapid and profound change. Through the Pathways Initiative, theological schools will take deliberate steps to address the challenges they have identified in ways that make the most sense to them. We believe that their efforts are critical to ensuring that Christian congregations continue to have a steady stream of pastoral leaders who are well-prepared to lead the churches of tomorrow.”

Lilly Endowment launched the Pathways initiative in January 2021 because of its longstanding interest in supporting efforts to enhance and sustain the vitality of Christian congregations by

strengthening the leadership capacities of pastors and congregational lay leaders.

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About Lilly Endowment Inc.

Lilly Endowment Inc. is an Indianapolis-based private philanthropic 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. Although the gifts of stock remain a 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 founders' hometown, Indianapolis, and home state, Indiana. The primary aim of its grantmaking in religion, which is national in scope, focuses on strengthening the leadership and vitality of Christian congregations in the United States. The Endowment also seeks to foster public understanding about religion and lift up in fair, accurate and balanced ways the contributions that people of all faiths and religious communities make to our greater civic well-being.

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