



Gifts of Grace

Toward Financial Wellbeing

Ministerial Excellence Fund

(Formerly the Lilly Project)

We have a new name!

A goal of the Lilly Project is that it will be a part of our synod's life for the long term and not something that ends after three or six years. Though the Lilly Project has become identifiable to many after three years of work, we will adopt a name that will better communicate our work. Gifts of Grace is the chosen name. This name reflects what we have heard from some who have given us feedback similar to this: "With this grant from the MEF, I feel like I have received an experience of grace."

Our byline is "Toward Financial Wellbeing," which further identifies our mission for the long term. The wellness we seek is for individuals, families, and congregations. (Some may even experience this mission for financial wellness moving out into our communities, too.)

Many are familiar with the Ministerial Excellence Fund (MEF). That name will stay the same. The MEF is a significant part of Gifts of Grace. Another aspect of Gifts of Grace is providing resources for financial literacy, financial health, and stewardship training.

The Lilly Endowment Inc. renews its work with us

We have begun a new three-year period of work with the Lilly Endowment Inc. Our first three-year term was 2016-2018. In 2018, The Lilly Endowment approached us with an offer to apply for a second three-year term so that we may further invest our gains in the life of our synod. We applied, were accepted, and will now be working with them through 2021.

With this new term comes a new infusion of money for our work with the requirement that we match the money they give us. Lilly will provide \$250,000 and we will be raising another \$250,000 from individual and congregational donations. Given the generosity shown 2016-2018 in raising matching funds, we know we can do this.

If you would like to support the work of Gifts of Grace and have your gift matched by the Lilly Endowment Inc., here is how you can give:

- Mail a gift to SW MN Synod, PO Box 499, Redwood Falls, MN 56283
- Make a one-time gift online or set up an automatic EFT payment for recurring gifts online. Please visit www.swmnelca.org, click the Online Giving button under the red Quick Links
- For more information or to speak with someone about a gift, please contact Southwestern Minnesota Synod at 507-637-3904.

Leadership update

Pr. Andrew Hermodson-Olsen has served as the director of the Lilly Project for the last two years, taking over for Pr. Bill Nelsen, the first director. Under a new phase of Gifts of Grace, Bishop Anderson asked Pr. Dwaine Bruns to join the leadership as a co-director with Pr. Andrew. Pr. Dwaine and Pr. Andrew will divide the duties and invite others to share in this work.

Bishop Anderson, Synod Minister Kathryn Skoglund, and Director for Evangelical Mission Larry Strenge have been deeply involved in advising and guiding the program from week to week. We thank Deb Hess, who provided wonderful administrative help for this program but has now ended her work in our synod office. The new administrative assistant is Maggie Berggren.

The Lilly Project was also guided by an Implementation Team which met every other month and offered perspective in shaping the program. We thank those who served on that team. A new team will be formed as we move into the next three-year term of Gifts of Grace.

Ministerial Excellence Fund

The Ministerial Excellence Fund has given four types of grants for rostered minister in our synod over the last three years and desires to be of help to our rostered leaders for years to come.

In January we distributed the MEF's Grant for Educational Loan Reduction. Fifty pastors received help to reduce their educational debt. This is where we have dedicated a large portion of the MEF's funds and we are getting feedback that it is making a difference.

Here is some of the feedback we have received:

Debt Reduction Grant:

"We are inexpressibly grateful that our synod is willing to share in our burden. This gift has emboldened us in our hope that one day, sooner than later, we will be debt-free. Experiencing this generosity is a bright reminder that our life is not filled with scarcity, but abundance."

Medical Grant:

"Thank you so much for helping cover some of our large difficult summer medical expenses. Please let everyone involved with this grant know that this means a great deal to our family. The stress that comes from family health expenses like ours are hard to live and work with and this grant money has been a gift of grace in our lives."

Retirement Equity Grant:

"I am very grateful for the Pension Equity Grant that I received recently. I did not expect to receive anything, so it was a more than pleasant surprise. This gift is more than money - it's more than funds for retirement - it's acknowledgement that SW MN Synod truly cares about its pastors and offers help to them in very tangible ways. I am blessed!"

Donor Statement:

"The reason we financially support the education debt reduction grant is because it proves that we are a welcoming synod, not just to encourage our present pastors to stay but also future pastors to look within our synod for their next call. We want to set our pastors, who carry educational debt free, to serve with greater joy. By supporting rostered leaders with grants for educational debt, medical emergencies, and pension contributions, we encourage our rostered leaders to speak about the grace of God and invite generosity in their ministries. We also hope this will encourage pastors to stay in our synod and deepen their roots in their contexts of service."

It is my hope that many of you within the Southwestern Minnesota Synod who also see the need to support our pastors would be encouraged to gift to Gifts of Grace and help support our pastors within the Southwestern Minnesota Synod." - Rev. Bill and Rev. Marlene Elmstrom

