



## + *Andrew Hermodson-Olsen, Lilly Coordinator*

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### ***The Lilly Project Report to the Southwestern Minnesota Synod Assembly 2018***

We are now in our third year of the three-year grant awarded us by the Lilly Endowment, Inc. as part of the Lilly Endowment's National Initiative to Address Economic Challenges Facing Pastoral Leaders. The Lilly Project, as we call it, seeks to make a healthy cultural change in our synod by focusing on improving financial health and financial stewardship. We are concerned about both financial literacy and financial strains among our leaders. Attending to both will make for healthier leaders and more satisfied congregations.

Here are some of the **activities** we have undertaken as part of the Lilly Project:

- Energizing and Mobilizing Your Congregation – In March 2018, we had the “Live Generously. Live Happier.” event in Marshall. In 2017 we had three events in St. Peter.
- Facebook Book Club – encouraging the reading and discussion of select books
- Executive Certificate in Religious Fund Raising – sending leaders for new training in financial stewardship
- Stewardship for All Seasons – engaging congregations in new stewardship education and practice.

We also value our partnerships with Lutheran Social Service's Financial Counseling and Portico, through which pastors and others have access to education and guidance.

The Lilly Project also established the **Ministerial Excellence Fund (MEF)**. It was first funded by donations of individuals and congregations that were matched by a Lilly grant of \$250,000. We are thankful that we have fully met that matching grant. Now donations continue to be received to continue the work of the MEF.

This past year we have expanded the role of the MEF in our synod's life. **Four grants** are now available to pastors from the MEF. (Guidelines from the Lilly Endowment require that we focus the work of the MEF to pastors.) The Grant for Reduction of Student Educational Loans has had the largest impact with \$200,000 distributed over two years. It has helped pastors reduce their principal, thereby shortening the length of their payback period. Almost \$ 15,000 has been distributed through the Grant for Unexpected Medical Expenses. It is a good addition to the prayer and care we wish to show pastors and their families in times of medical need. The Grant for Retirement Equity gives pastors who are being paid below guidelines an opportunity to have their retirement account contribution increased. Finally, the Retirement Contribution Challenge Grant incentivizes any pastor to contribute money into their retirement account. The last two grants mentioned have paid out about \$ 8,000 combined.

We are still learning from our work and desire to do well for the benefit of the leaders and congregations in our synod. I am **thankful** for the work and support of Bishop Jon Anderson, Pastor Kathryn Skoglund, Pastor Larry Strenge, Deb Hess, Carla Klawitter, and the ten other people who make up the Lilly Implementation Team.

At the beginning of 2018, the Lilly Endowment announced a **Phase II** to this national initiative to further help us sustain our work and incorporate what we have learned into our synod's structure and life.

In Christ's service,

*Pastor Andrew Hermodson-Olsen*