



# Gifts of Grace

Toward Financial Wellbeing

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Ministerial Excellence Fund

## **When does “let’s try this” turn into “this is what we do?”**

We believe that the culture of our synod is tied, in part, to our leaders’ financial wellbeing, financial literacy, and ability to talk about and live out the life of a steward. We also believe that congregations benefit from financially healthy pastors as well as programs that connect with their ministry.

### **“Let’s try this”: The Lilly Project**

Between 2016 and 2018 we had an opportunity to develop a program focused on these areas that we believe have an important effect on the culture and life of our synod and congregations. During this period we participated in the first phase of Lilly Endowment Inc.’s national initiative to “Address Economic Challenges Facing Pastoral Leaders.” In our “let’s try it” phase, we raised funds that were matched by a grant from Lilly Endowment Inc., planned programs, and pushed back against the silence that falls over conversations about our finances. Significantly, we started the Ministerial Excellence Fund (MEF).

### **“This is what we do”: Gifts of Grace**

We are excited to continue our work into the future and further establish our gains in the ongoing work of our synod. We have learned how stressful financial burdens are for some of our pastors as well as how the MEF’s grants and the Lutheran Social Service financial counseling is bringing hope to them. The quality programming we encourage and support provide both pastors and congregations a better future.

In the last few months we have named this program “Gifts of Grace: Toward Financial Wellbeing.” It replaces the name we have been using (Lilly Project), and it will take us into the future.

## **Your Involvement**

We encourage you to learn about the Gifts of Grace program by reading the articles about it in the Synod News. Take advantage of the educational events that we will be promoting in the future. Check out the grants that the MEF has made available to pastors and deacons. If you are a rostered leader, take advantage of the grants available to you, and if you are a congregation member, talk to your pastor or deacon to make sure they know about the MEF grants.

The Lilly Endowment has given us a new grant of \$250,000 in matching funds for the next three years (2019-2021) as part of a second phase of its national initiative. This grant, and your financial support of the Gifts of Grace Program and the MEF that is a part of it, will further support our efforts to make our work an enduring part of our synod’s life. See the synod’s webpage for information on how you and your congregation can give financially to this work.

## **Recounting our Work: 2018**

In this past year, the Ministerial Excellence Fund gave grants to 113 rostered leaders:

- 50 rostered leaders received a grant to reduce the educational loans
- 33 rostered leaders received a grant which encouraged them to save more for retirement
- 9 rostered leaders who are paid below guidelines received a grant to their retirement account
- 21 rostered leaders who had an unexpected medical expense in their family received a grant to help with the bills

Each of these grants comes from the Ministerial Excellence Fund. They demonstrate the care we as a synod wish to give to our rostered leaders.

In this past year, Gifts of Grace supported financial literacy and stewardship education:

- 6 pastors attended the Executive Certificate in Religious Fundraising
- 8 congregations had leadership training through Stewardship for All Seasons
- 12 congregations participated in the Cultivating Generous Congregations training
- LSS Financial Counseling continued to offer free counselling sessions to people in our synod

We know that measuring our program goes well beyond recounting numbers of people involved. Our broader goals are changed lives, thriving congregations, and a culture of support and generosity in our synod.

## **Looking Forward**

Here are some things we want to lift up as we move into Phase II:

- Pastor Dwaine Bruns is joining the leadership team as a co-director with Pastor Andrew Hermodson-Olsen.
- The Implementation Team, which helps with the program's leadership, will start again with some new members.
- MEF grants continue to be offered to help with specific economic challenges of our rostered leaders.
- 15 pastors will be trained in the Executive Certificate in Religious Fundraising in June.
- A program for treasurers and pastors will take place in the fall to learn and encourage some best practices in handling congregational finances.

In service to Christ,

Pastor Andrew Hermodson-Olsen and Pastor Dwaine Bruns  
Gifts of Grace directors