

Million-Dollar Grant Positions Evangel University, AGTS to Train More Black and Hispanic Ministers

Evangel University has received a \$1 million grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. to establish pathways to an advanced degree for underserved student groups at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, the embedded seminary of the university. The grant will help strengthen current and establish new theological training specifically focused on Black and Hispanic ministers.

“Evangel University and AGTS share a rich history of preparing leaders for effective pulpit ministry for the Assemblies of God (AG), charismatic groups and nondenominational churches,” said Dr. Mike Rakes, Evangel University president.

“This grant funding enables us to take our training to a new level, offering ministers from Black and Hispanic backgrounds new pathways to obtain a theological education. These diverse graduates will enter our alumni pool and serve on oversight boards and governing bodies to better shape our institutions.”

The university will focus on two strategic initiatives to better serve Black and Hispanic communities.

The William Seymour Initiative will respond to the unique challenges expressed by Black leaders and pastors from the National Black Fellowship of the AG and the historically Black Pentecostal denomination Church of God in Christ. AGTS will partner with key leaders to offer contextualized education to pastors, as well as establish a pathway to train and support the next generation of Black pastors for the ministry.

Additionally, AGTS will develop an intentional platform for ongoing discussion between all races on specific social justice challenges facing Black communities to increase empathy and foster reconciliation.

The Hispanic Initiative will expand current educational offerings to Spanish-speaking pastors with adaptation of elective courses to better serve the needs facing local congregations.

The grant is part of Lilly Endowment's Pathways for Tomorrow Initiative, a three-phase initiative designed to help theological schools across the United States and Canada prioritize and respond to the most pressing challenges they face in their efforts to prepare pastoral leaders, both now and in the future.

Evangel is one of 84 theological schools 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, Black church and historic peace church traditions (for example, 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 ministry," said Christopher L. Coble, Lilly 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 can take deliberate steps to address the challenges they have identified. We believe these 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. {eoa}

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. 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. Learn more by visiting them at .

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