

**PRESS RELEASE**  
**for Omaha Presbyterian Seminary Foundation**  
**recipient of grant in the**  
**Thriving in Ministry Initiative**

Contact: Gary S. Eller  
402-397-5138  
gseller@opsf-oamha.org

10/3/18

Omaha Presbyterian Seminary Foundation has received a grant of \$1million to help establish the Pastoral Leadership Revitalization program. It is part of Lilly Endowment Inc.'s Thriving in Ministry, an initiative that supports a variety of religious organizations across the nation as they create or strengthen programs that help pastors build relationships with experienced clergy who can serve as mentors and guide them through key leadership challenges in congregational ministry.

The Endowment is making nearly \$70 million in grants through the Thriving in Ministry initiative.

The ultimate purpose of OPSF's Pastoral Leadership Revitalization program is to foster self-sufficiency and vitality in communities of faith in the rural congregations of the Midwest and challenged congregations in underserved urban neighborhoods. To achieve this, program activities are built upon OPSF's 127 years of experience in pastoral leadership and spiritual development activities. Program objectives are to increase pastoral resilience and adaptive leadership; to stem the attrition rate ordained and lay pastors; and to create a network of pastoral leadership in the 13-state region that the Omaha Presbyterian Seminary Foundation serves.

The program will continue OPSF's commitment to pastoral leadership, living into our mission to "to seek, develop and support excellence in Christian leadership through the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)." The program will serve distinct populations of pastors: 1) first call pastors, especially those in rural communities, in their first three years of service; 2) pastors in key professional transitions called to rural communities for the first time; 3) lay pastors who excel in some leadership and pastoral care qualities but lack formal training; 4) pastors in distressed inner-city environments of Kansas City, St. Louis or Omaha, especially of fellowships of first- or second-generation immigrant and refugee populations. The program and the service area of OPSF are focused on rural congregations where churches face unique challenges. In Central Nebraska, some congregations are just surviving. PLR will provide targeted support to clergy including those in federated churches within and across denominational lines, for resource-sharing and efficiencies to keep church doors open for all Christians in those regions. In Missouri Valley Presbytery, targeted training, mentoring and peer support will be provided to the underserved urban congregations and unchartered fellowships, who need specialized support in energizing their congregations and becoming missional. Across all program activities, OPSF's program will develop and foster collegial relations among pastors through mentor-mentee

relationships, clergy coaching, spiritual direction, retreats, and networking with peers facing similar challenges in their congregations and spiritual lives.

“The Pastoral Leadership Revitalization program will provide hope and resources to challenged pastors and their congregations. We envision this project becoming a template for future initiatives. We are very grateful for this grant to help expand this program further than our resources alone would allow,” said the Rev. Dr. Gary S. Eller, president of Omaha Presbyterian Seminary Foundation.

Omaha Presbyterian Seminary Foundation is one of 78 organizations located in 29 states that is taking part in the initiative. The organizations reflect diverse Christian traditions: mainline and evangelical Protestant, Roman Catholic and Orthodox.

Thriving in Ministry is part of Lilly Endowment’s grantmaking to strengthen pastoral leadership in Christian congregations in the United States. This has been a grantmaking priority at Lilly Endowment for nearly 25 years.

“Leading a congregation today is multi-faceted and exceptionally demanding,” said Christopher L. Coble, Lilly Endowment’s vice president for religion. “When pastors have opportunities to build meaningful relationships with experienced colleagues, they are able to negotiate the challenges of ministry and their leadership thrives. These promising programs, including Omaha Presbyterian Seminary Foundation’s Pastoral Leadership Revitalization, will help pastors develop these kinds of relationships, especially when they are in the midst of significant professional transitions.”

**Lilly Endowment Inc.** is an Indianapolis-based private philanthropic foundation created in 1937 by three members of the Lilly family - J.K. Lilly Sr. and sons Eli and J.K. Jr. - through gifts of stock in their pharmaceutical business, Eli Lilly & Company. While those gifts remain the financial bedrock of the Endowment, the Endowment 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 Endowment maintains a special commitment to its hometown, Indianapolis, and its home state Indiana. Its grantmaking in religion focuses on supporting efforts to strengthen the leadership and vitality of Christian congregations throughout the country and to increase the public’s understanding of the role of religion in public life.