



MACC partnering with Saint John University's School of Theology and Seminary's "Sustained Encuentro: Accompanying One Another on the Way"

July 19, 2022

Saint John's University has received a grant of \$5 million from Lilly Endowment Inc. to support Saint John's School of Theology and Seminary as it develops its new initiative, "Sustained *Encuentro*: Accompanying One Another on the Way." Empowered by this grant, Saint John's School of Theology and Seminary (SOT/Sem) will partner with the Mexican American Catholic College (MACC) to prepare next generation leaders for the church and world.

"Sustained *Encuentro*" is funded through [Lilly Endowment's Pathways for Tomorrow Initiative](#), a three-phase initiative to support theological schools across the United States and Canada as they prioritize and respond to the most pressing challenges facing pastoral leaders of Christian congregations both now and into the future. In early 2022, Lilly Endowment awarded Saint John's University and the SOT/Seminary a \$1 million phase two grant to support its new venture: [Conversatio: Creating a Culture of Encounter](#). MACC is an implementing partner in that grant as well. "Sustained *Encuentro*" is funded through the competitive third phase of Lilly Endowment's Pathways for Tomorrow Initiative. Phase three grants support a limited number of large-scale, collaborative efforts that explore new educational and financial models for theological education. Lilly Endowment expects to award additional phase three grants in the fall of 2022.

Launching "Sustained *Encuentro*" comes at an opportune time for the SOT/Seminary and MACC as the two institutions seek to train and support future pastoral leaders across the United States, particularly in rural areas of need. It forges new partnerships with rural Catholic dioceses and religious institutions that make the schools degree and certificate programs increasingly accessible for lay ecclesial ministers and diaconal candidates. The project seeks to deliver top-tier theological education to many who might otherwise lack opportunity. Central to the initiative is a sustained partnership between MACC and Saint John's University School of Theology/Seminary. Aligning the SOT/Seminary's distinguished strengths in ecclesiology, liturgy, sacramental theology and practical theology with MACC's historic legacy in bilingual education for pastoral and Hispanic ministry, "Sustained *Encuentro*" aims to deliver a one-of-a-kind and intentionally intercultural education experience that prepares future Christian leaders, including growing Hispanic Latino/a communities, for the work of ministry and ecclesial leadership.

The encounter and exchange between Saint John's and MACC charts new territory in graduate theological education. Rather than competing for resources and services, "Sustained *Encuentro*" imagines a mutually edifying institutional relationship that feeds the distinctive strengths of both schools to achieve common goals. Father Juan Molina, president of MACC, shares: "I welcome Lilly Endowment's announcement with great joy, as I know mission dioceses and dioceses in the Southwest will benefit from our offering of new programs to help them prepare ministers. In our multicultural church and society, it is imperative that we prepare people not only to serve others but to do it with a sense of faith and inclusion of those who are most vulnerable and marginalized. 'Sustained *Encuentro*' will allow us to form ministers more intently. Our collaboration with Saint John's University School of Theology and Seminary will grow and will be mutually beneficial in service to the church across the United States."

Celebrating the past and envisioning the future

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Dean of Saint John's SOT/Seminary Shawn Colberg stated: "The sheer scale of this grant is groundbreaking. Lilly Endowment's phase three grant enables the SOT/Seminary to leverage its national reputation and institutional resources to support emerging pastoral needs and leadership opportunities through expanded curricular programming, student scholarships, and faculty support. Partnering with MACC extends our mission and enriches our understanding of the church today. Our ongoing and dynamic relationship with Lilly Endowment increases the reach and impact of our programming for which we are grateful."

Founded in 1857 as the first school of Catholic higher education in Minnesota, Saint John's School of Theology and Seminary is a national leader in graduate theological education, preparing students for leadership, ministry, and advanced studies in theology. In addition to its connections with Saint John's University and the College of Saint Benedict, the SOT/Seminary thrives in a series of wider campus relationships such as with the Liturgical Press, among others. "Sustained *Encuentro*" further harnesses and advances these assets by expanding opportunity and access to new cohorts of students throughout the United States.

Celebrating the reception of Lilly Endowment's \$5 million grant, College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University President Brian Bruess states: "We are inspired by this profoundly transformational grant from Lilly Endowment, allowing for new exploration in graduate theological education. This impactful partnership, in service to the church's commitment to personal encounter and engaging diverse voices, is yet another grand example of the innovative spirit found at Saint John's University and the College of St. Benedict. This grant enables our beloved School of Theology and Seminary to partner with the MACC, providing a model for collaboration and meeting the needs of the time."

Founded in 1972 as the Mexican American Cultural Center, MACC quickly became a leading center for Hispanic Ministry in the United States. In 2008, as the Mexican American Catholic College, MACC became the first college in the country to offer a bilingual and biliterate Bachelor of Arts degree in Pastoral Ministry which could lead to a Master's in Pastoral Ministry. In 2012, MACC began to offer these two degree programs in collaboration with the University of the Incarnate Word (UIW). MACC has a diverse student body and serves more than 300 students annually through its degree-based and continuing education programs, which include courses, workshops on Hispanic Ministry and Intercultural Competencies, and special events.

Bishop Michael Boulette, Auxiliary Bishop of San Antonio and Chairman of the Board of MACC, says, "I am delighted to learn of this significant grant from the Lily Endowment to the 'Sustained *Encuentro*' initiative. Most of my priestly ministry has consisted of serving in rural areas, and I am thrilled that this project will provide top-tier theological education to those 'laborers in the vineyard' who don't reside in an urban setting. As the Church moves forward in hope with the Holy Father in pastoral accompaniment, this is exactly the type of new collaboration that springs forth from an emphasis on synodality."

The Pathways initiative is part of Lilly Endowment's wider efforts to strengthen theological schools and other religious institutions and networks that prepare pastoral leaders to ensure that a diverse array of Christian congregations are guided by a steady stream of wise, faithful and well- prepared leaders.

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About Lilly Endowment Inc.

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 and maintains a special commitment to its founders' hometown, Indianapolis, and home state, Indiana. A primary aim of its grantmaking in religion is to deepen the religious lives of Christians, principally by supporting efforts that enhance congregational vitality and strengthen the leadership of Christian communities. The Endowment values the broad diversity of Christian traditions and endeavors to support them in a wide variety of contexts. The Endowment also seeks to foster public understanding about religion by encouraging fair, accurate and balanced portrayals of the positive and negative effects of religion on the world and lifting up the contributions that people of all faiths make to our greater civic well-being.

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