

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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The **Baptist General Convention of Virginia (BGCVA)** has received a **\$1,250,000.00** grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. to help establish the **“Bringing, Growing & Changing Congregations and Communities Together”** project.

The project is being funded through Lilly Endowment’s Thriving Congregations Initiative. The aim of the initiative to encourage the flourishing of congregations by helping them deepen their relationships with God, enhance their connections with each other, and contribute to the vitality of their communities and the world.

**On behalf of President Milton P. Bunting and the General Board of BGCVA, we are delighted and honored to receive funding through Lilly Endowment’s Thriving Congregations Initiative. Dr. Leo Whitaker, Executive Minister states, “Bringing, Growing & Changing Congregations and Communities Together will focus the new program on helping churches develop ministries and expand practices that are relevant to the lives of the congregants, help congregants connect more closely to God and each other, and empower congregants to serve the relevant needs of their communities.”**

**The key activities of this grant include:**

- 1) Organizing regionally based wraparound teams of ministry experts and consultants to assist churches in their work of ministry discernment;**
- 2) Launching a descriptive data gathering process that helps us to determine the spiritual, relational, and social health of congregations; and**
- 3) Engaging in tangible ministry empowering processes with member churches through regional trainings, church learning grants, cluster groupings, and the development of resource/ministry guides.**

**Our thematic focus of “Bringing People Together, Growing Churches, and Changing Communities,” highlights the Conventions’ commitment to strengthening all aspects of the faith community, and it aligns Lilly Endowment’s goals in its Thriving Congregations Initiative.**

**The BGCVA has established a sacred trust with our pastors, people, and partners in the community. We are honored to create a mutual relationship that allows for greater work, worship, and ministry as a collective witness. We believe that unimaginable gifts and graces are waiting for us in the future to discover anew our way forward!**

The Baptist General Convention of Virginia is one of 104 organizations that has received grants through a competitive round of the Thriving Congregations Initiative. Reflecting a wide variety of Christian traditions, the organizations represent mainline Protestant, evangelical, Catholic, Orthodox, peace church and Pentecostal faith communities.

“Congregations play an essential role in deepening the faith of individuals and contributing to the vitality of communities,” said Christopher L. Coble, Lilly Endowment’s vice president for religion. “We hope that these programs will nurture the vibrancy and spark the creativity of congregations, helping them imagine new ways to share God’s love in their communities and across the globe.”

### **About Lilly Endowment Inc.**

Lilly Endowment Inc. is a private 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. While those gifts remain the 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 hometown, Indianapolis, and home state, Indiana. A principal aim of the Endowment’s religion grantmaking is to deepen and enrich the lives of Christians in the United States, primarily by seeking out and supporting efforts that enhance the vitality of congregations and strengthen the pastoral and lay leadership of Christian communities. The Endowment also seeks to improve public understanding of diverse religious traditions by supporting fair and accurate portrayals of the role religion plays in the United States and across the globe.