



News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Friday, December 10, 2021

WYCLIFFE COLLEGE TO ESTABLISH CANADIAN INSTITUTE FOR EMPIRICAL CHURCH RESEARCH WITH GRANT FROM LILLY ENDOWMENT

TORONTO, ON—Wycliffe College through the University of Toronto has received a grant of \$999,075 US from Lilly Endowment Inc. to establish the Canadian Institute for Empirical Church Research. The Institute, which will be established in partnership with WayBase, will be the first of its kind in Canada.

The project is being funded through Lilly Endowment’s Pathways for Tomorrow Initiative. It is a three-phase initiative designed to help theological schools across the United States and Canada as they prioritize and respond to the most pressing challenges they face as they prepare pastoral leaders for Christian congregations both now and into the future.

WayBase is a data aggregating platform containing over 500 million points of data on 34,000 Canadian charities tracked over 20 years. The Canadian Institute for Empirical Church Research will build a portal to access the WayBase dataset and provide research support and guidance offering church researchers and leaders a rare opportunity to learn about the nature, challenges, and opportunities facing the Canadian Church. By leveraging aggregate data and machine learning, this type of research will be more cost-effective, expeditious, and comprehensive than traditional church research methods.

“This is not only an exciting opportunity for Wycliffe, it will be game-changing for the Canadian church,” said Stephen Hewko, Wycliffe College Program Director. “Imagine being able to conduct an in-depth, data-driven study into what differentiates great churches from merely good ones, or an analysis of what contributes to the death or recovery of church congregations in urban or rural areas. The Institute will be able to conduct exactly these kinds of meaningful research studies in timely and cost-effective ways.”

“Wycliffe’s mission is to educate people for practical ministry and theological scholarship in Christ’s global church and the world,” says Wycliffe College Principal Stephen Andrews, “and this initiative will help to position the College as a locus of information and support on trends and developments in the Canadian Church.”

Wycliffe College is one of 84 theological schools that are benefiting from 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 and Black church and historic peace church traditions (e.g., 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 churches,” 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 will take deliberate steps to address the challenges they have identified in ways that make the most sense to them. We believe that their 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.

-30-

About Wycliffe College

Wycliffe College is a graduate theological school, affiliated with the University of Toronto and Toronto School of Theology. Located at the centre of the University of Toronto in the heart of Canada’s most multicultural city, Wycliffe College is an evangelical seminary with roots in the Anglican tradition, educating and equipping students to thrive as future Church and community leaders.

Founded in 1877, Wycliffe today is one of this country’s largest seminaries. It boasts a world-class teaching staff, fees among the most affordable in Canada, and a low student-to-faculty ratio. Known for an enduring commitment to intellectual rigour, evangelical vision, and practical action, Wycliffe College attracts more than 250 students from a broad range of denominations, backgrounds, and nations each year.

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. 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.

Contact:

Stephen Hewko

Program Director, Wycliffe College

Ph: (416) 262-3878

Email: stephen.hewko@wycliffe.utoronto.ca

Web: www.wycliffecollege.ca