

St. Mark's College at UBC Receives US\$ 1M to form & support pastoral leaders in BC and the Yukon

Funding from Lilly Endowment to establish a Centre serving as a sustainable, region-wide hub for theological education, formation, and diocesan partnership — of faithful and creative ministry leaders in an increasingly complex and diverse world

VANCOUVER, BC, CANADA, Nov. 4, 2025 — St. Mark's College, which is celebrating its 70th Anniversary this year, has received a grant of \$1 million USD from Lilly Endowment Inc. to work on the project: *The Future of Ministry: Forming and Empowering Leaders for Mission in BC and the Yukon*.

This project is being funded through the Lilly Endowment's Pathways for Tomorrow Initiative, which is intended to help theological schools across the United States and Canada strengthen their educational and financial capacities to prepare and support pastoral leaders for Christian congregations both now and into the future.

Supported by every Roman Catholic bishop across BC and the Yukon, the five-year initiative addresses urgent ecclesial challenges, including declining clergy numbers; rising lay leadership; cultural and religious pluralism; and the need for reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. Informed by insights from a recent regional Summit hosted on October 3-5, 2025, St. Mark's College will establish a Centre for Ministerial Formation to serve as a sustainable, region-wide hub for theological education, formation, and diocesan partnership. The Centre will focus on expanding access to theological education in traditionally underserved dioceses and on forming leaders — both lay ecclesial ministers and candidates for the permanent diaconate — for faithful and creative ministry in an increasingly complex and diverse world.

In support of these goals, the Centre will launch a hybrid continuing education course with in-person summer integration weekends; coordinate in-service events; host professional development workshops and lectures; and coordinate mid-term and closing conferences. The Centre's inaugural Director will play a pivotal role in advancing this initiative by building relationships with dioceses, advising students, coordinating recruitment and communications, and implementing new programming. At the same time, the project will invest in library resources and distance-learning infrastructure to support distance students who may never visit campus. By reducing financial and geographic barriers for prospective students, this initiative will make high-quality, contextually grounded theological education accessible to ministers across BC and the Yukon — many for the first time.

As Dr. Gerry Turcotte, Principal of St. Mark's College noted, "The Pathways project has been an innovative and ground-breaking initiative that has helped theological colleges undertake transformational work in their communities. Our new Centre for Ministerial Formation will inspire and enable St. Mark's College to expand the reach of theological education and help deepen collaboration across BC and the Yukon. Our College has already begun the needed work of helping our stakeholders stay connected, but the impact of this grant will help us to accelerate our work exponentially. In a constantly evolving pastoral landscape marked by new and emerging challenges, the Lilly Grant offers hope and opportunity."

St. Mark's College is one of 163 theological schools that have received grants since 2021 through the Pathways initiative. Together, the schools serve a broad spectrum of Christian traditions in the U.S. and Canada. They are affiliated with evangelical, mainline Protestant, nondenominational, Pentecostal, Orthodox, Catholic, Black church, Latino, Asian American, Indigenous and historic peace church traditions.

"Theological schools have long played a central role for most denominations and church networks in preparing and supporting pastoral leaders who guide congregations," said Christopher L. Coble, the Endowment's vice president for religion. "These schools are paying close attention to the challenges churches are facing today and will face in the foreseeable future. The grants will help these schools engage in wide-ranging, innovative efforts to adapt their educational programs and build their financial capacities so they can better prepare pastors and lay ministers to effectively lead the congregations they will serve in the future."

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 religion and lift up in fair, accurate and balanced ways the roles that people of all faiths and various religious communities play in the United States and around the globe.

lillyendowment.org

About St. Mark's College

St. Mark's College at the University of British Columbia, a centre of excellence for Catholic higher education in British Columbia for over 70 years, is accredited by the Association of Theological Schools, the major accreditor of graduate theological education in North America.

Forming ministers and leaders for service to the Church and the world has been central to the mission of St. Mark's College since its inception in 1956.

St. Mark's has been entrusted by the Archdiocese of Vancouver with the formation of candidates for the Permanent Diaconate and partnered with the Catholic Independent Schools of the Vancouver Archdiocese (CISVA) to form Catholic teachers and administrators.

stmarkscollege.ca

Attachment

Photo of the grant co-authors from L to R: Dr. Fiona Li, Rev. Dr. Nick Meisl, Dr. Nicholas Olkovich,

and Dr. Lynda Robitaille.



Photo credit: St. Mark's College/Jacob Imoo

For more information please contact:

Dr. Lynda Robitaille, Provost | Dean of Graduate Studies

St. Mark's College

T: 604-822-6862 Ext. 129

E: lrobitaille@stmarkscollege.ca