**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**St. Luke’s Atlanta and Church Anew Receive $1.25 Million to Amplify Diverse Preaching Voices**

**The Grant, awarded by Lilly Endowment Inc., seeks to transform preaching in mainline Christian churches**

Atlanta, Ga. (Oct. 30, 2023) — St. Luke’s Atlanta and Church Anew have received a grant of $1.25 million from Lilly Endowment Inc. to establish “[Enfleshing Witness: Rewilding Otherwise Preaching](https://churchanew.org/enfleshingwitness)” in support of the development of preachers of color in mainline churches.

"Our goal is to rewild the preacher and the sermon, allowing them to flourish in the diverse landscapes of the communities we live in," said the Rev. Winnie Varghese. "By encouraging preachers of color to embrace their unique perspectives and draw from their rich cultural backgrounds, we aim to amplify the voices that are often overlooked and bring new life to the art of preaching."

The Enfleshing Witness program, spearheaded by St. Luke’s Rector the Rev. Winnie Varghese and a team of exemplary preachers across various denominations, seeks to address the vital need for increased diversity of leadership and voices within the American Christian tradition. The Enfleshing Witness leadership team includes the Rev. Dr. Eric Barreto, Weyerhaeuser Associate Professor of New Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary, the Rev. Dr. Valerie Bridgeman, Dean and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Methodist Theological School in Ohio and founder and president of WomenPreach!, Inc., the Rev. Matthew Ian Fleming, founding director of Church Anew, the Rev. Mihee Kim-Kort, author and co-pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Annapolis, Md., the Rev. Wesley Morris, senior pastor of Faith Community Church in Greensboro, N.C., and the Rev. Dr. Theresa S. Thames, Associate Dean of Religious Life and of the Chapel at Princeton University. With a focus on reclaiming forgotten storytelling traditions, embracing innovative digital communication methods and incorporating the creative talents of artists into the sermon preparation process, this initiative aims to revolutionize the practice of preaching.

The program is funded through Lilly Endowment’s Compelling Preaching Initiative, which strives to foster and support preaching that inspires, encourages and guides people to come to know and love God and to live out their Christian faith more fully.

The Enfleshing Witness initiative will unfold over five years, with 50 preachers of color joining local cohorts, sharing knowledge and exploring alternative forms of preaching. These preachers will participate in platforming retreats, where they will enhance their digital proclamation skills and create compelling sermon videos that resonate with diverse audiences.

Congregations will also play a pivotal role in supporting their preachers, experimenting with creative ways to connect with their communities and engaging them with the good news. These local efforts will be supported by the solidarity formed among preachers within their respective communities.

Furthermore, all materials generated within the cohort gatherings will be made accessible to an engaged community of more than 325,000 Christian leaders and 1,500 congregations through Church Anew. This collaboration will foster imaginative approaches to preaching and help breathe new life into the practice of preaching across the nation.

"Enfleshing Witness: Rewilding Otherwise Preaching" is poised to reshape the landscape of preaching, amplify diverse voices and usher in a new era of preaching that reflects the rich tapestry of cultures within the Christian Church. With support from Lilly Endowment, St. Luke's and Church Anew will create a sustainable initiative that transforms preaching, amplifies shared visions, and invites the entire Church to embrace God's wild dreams for communities.

The proposal written by St. Luke’s and Church Anew is one of 81 receiving grants through this competitive round of the Compelling Preaching Initiative. The organizations receiving grants reflect the diversity of Christianity in the United States and are affiliated with mainline Protestant, evangelical, Catholic, Orthodox, Anabaptist and Pentecostal faith communities. Many of the organizations receiving grants are rooted in the Black Church and in Hispanic and Asian American Christian traditions.

“Throughout history, preachers often have needed to adapt their preaching practices to engage new generations of hearers more effectively,” said Christopher L. Coble, who is Lilly Endowment’s vice president for religion. “We are pleased that the organizations receiving grants in this initiative will help pastors and others in ministry engage in the kinds of preaching needed today to ensure that the gospel message is heard and accessible for all audiences.”

Lilly Endowment launched the Compelling Preaching Initiative in 2022 because of its interest in supporting projects that help to nurture the religious lives of individuals and families and foster the growth and vitality of Christian congregations in the United States.

Learn more about the Enfleshing Witness program here: <https://churchanew.org/enfleshingwitness>.

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**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.

**About St. Luke's Atlanta**

St. Luke's Atlanta, a parish in The Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta, is located in the heart of downtown Atlanta on Peachtree Street. St. Luke’s has a rich history of service and social justice activism in the community. The church is committed to fostering a diverse and inclusive environment and has launched the "Enfleshing Witness: Rewilding Otherwise Preaching" initiative to further these values.

**About Church Anew**

Church Anew nourishes Christian leaders and sparks imagination for congregations around the country. It is a Spirit-led movement that gathers contributors who represent the broad diversity of Christian practice. Church Anew produces innovative resources for preaching, commentary on Scripture and current events, and inspiring gatherings that articulate a fresh, bold, and faithful witness in the world. Church Anew is eager to grow its partnership with Enfleshing Witness through the "Enfleshing Witness: Rewilding Otherwise Preaching” initiative because of its ongoing commitment to set a broader table of diverse Christian expression.

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