

Diocese awarded \$1,159,910 grant to help parents and caregivers share their faith and values with children

Contact: Dr. Patrick Donovan
203-416-1511
pdonovan@diobpt.org

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Bridgeport has received a grant of \$1,159,910 from Lilly Endowment Inc. to help establish the *First Witnesses* Project, which will be managed by the diocese's Institute for Catholic Formation.

The project is being funded through Lilly Endowment's Christian Parenting and Caregiving Initiative. The aim of the initiative to help parents and caregivers share their faith and values with their children.

First Witnesses is a comprehensive approach to supporting parents and parishes to work collaboratively to stem the tide of disaffiliation. Research tells us parents have incredible influence when it comes to their children choosing to remain engaged in religious practices. Birth to age three is the most precious time in a child's life, when the appropriation of ritual and language is strongest. *First Witnesses* seeks to combine the latest research with practical resources and opportunities for parents and congregations to build a culture of faithfulness.

The desired outcome of *First Witnesses* is to change the culture of our local parishes and create vibrant centers of worship with a growing demographic of young families. We anticipate parents and caregivers who are better able to articulate their faith, well-informed, and confident in the practice of rituals and other faith-centered activities in their homes.

"Parents are the first witnesses of the faith," Bishop Frank Caggiano commented in the application for the grant. "If, however, those parents lack the language to articulate the faith, if they lack the inspiration to ritualize the faith, and if they lack the support at the parish level, there is often little that gets passed on to the next generation. The generous grant from Lilly Endowment recognizes and supports the work of renewal in our diocese to build vital communities of faith that engage the young and accompany all in their journey of faith."

The Diocese of Bridgeport is one of 77 organizations that are receiving grants through this competitive round of the Lilly Endowment initiative. Reflecting the diversity of Christianity in the United States, the organizations are affiliated with mainline Protestant, evangelical, Catholic, Orthodox Christian and Pentecostal faith communities. Many of the organizations are rooted in Black church, Hispanic and Asian Christian traditions.

"We've heard from many parents who are seeking to nurture the spiritual lives of their children, especially in their daily activities, and looking to churches and other faith-based organizations for support," said Christopher L. Coble, Lilly Endowment's vice president for religion. "These thoughtful, creative and collaborative organizations embrace the important role that families have in shaping the religious development of children and are launching programs to assist parents and caregivers with this task."

Lilly Endowment launched the Christian Parenting and Caregiving Initiative in 2022 because of its interest in supporting efforts to help individuals and families from diverse Christian communities draw more fully on the wisdom of Christian practices to live out their faith fully and well passing on a vibrant faith to a new generation.

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 the Diocese of Bridgeport

The Diocese of Bridgeport includes more than 460,000 Catholics in Fairfield County, Connecticut, representing 45 percent of the total population. Geographically it encompasses all of Fairfield County and it includes 72 parishes and 82 churches. Mass is celebrated by 222 priests in 14 languages every weekend, reflecting the diversity of the region. In addition to serving more than 7,000 young people in its system of elementary and high schools, the diocese reaches out to more than 30,000 young people through its religious education program. The diocese also sponsors The Cardinal Shehan Center and the McGivney Center for inner-city children in downtown Bridgeport, and Catholic Charities, the largest private, non-profit provider of social services to people of all faiths in Fairfield County. The work of the Diocese is supported by Foundations in Faith, Foundations in Education, and Foundations in Charity, which provide funding for innovative programs, and renewal initiatives. For information visit: www.bridgeportdiocese.org

For information on the Institute for Catholic Formation, please visit <https://formationreimagined.org>.