

Inside the Institute

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New Collegeville Institute Program

The Collegeville Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research has received a new five-year \$250,000 grant from the Lilly Endowment, Inc. for a project designed to promote clergy leadership that looks beyond the local worshipping community to further a broader civic good. The grant continues and expands the work of the Collegeville Institute Fellows Program. While for the past four years the program has focused on issues faced by pastors and religious leaders in the urban areas of the Twin Cities region, the new grant enables the Collegeville Institute to pursue leadership development specifically among clergy in the small-towns and mid-size cities of rural Minnesota. The new initiative will encourage leaders of congregations across the state to become informed about, and address, issues that impact rural communities. Why a program focused on rural Minnesota?

Accounts of life in rural or small-

town America tend to fall into one of two narratives. In one, rural America is a place of bedrock religious values, clean living, community spirit, bucolic pastimes, and honest hard work—the “real America” evoked by countless political campaigns. In the other narrative small-town America is dying, plagued by declining populations, a brain drain of young talent departing for major urban areas, high suicide rates, poverty, drug problems, and the eclipse of the family farm by efficiency-minded agribusiness. The truth is that what is happening in rural America is complicated and follows many story lines rather than any one master narrative, positive or negative. What is unarguably true is that rural America is changing rapidly, for better and for worse.

Whatever might be going on in these local rural communities, congregations are there, served by pastors who know a great deal about the Bible, theology, and

pastoral ministry, but who may be less informed about the broad social forces that are shaping their communities. The new grant program will address the relatively neglected social, civic, and economic issues of rural Minnesota.

Through this new program, then, the Collegeville Institute hopes to assist pastors in mid-size cities and small towns to expand their understanding of themselves as leaders both within their congregations and in the larger communities in which their congregations are embedded, broaden and deepen their grasp of key public issues facing those larger communities within Minnesota, help them develop intellectual tools necessary for their discernment of wise responses to the issues they learn about, and support them in gaining a level of confidence in themselves as church and community leaders whose call is to witness to a scriptural message that bears upon all of life.

Quiz: The Church in Rural America

A revealing article that appeared in the online publication *Faith & Leadership* called attention to some issues relating to “The Church in Rural America,” as the piece was titled, and invited readers to take a 10 question quiz that tested their knowledge about the rural church. Two questions and answers in particular caught our attention. The first question was:

Rural congregations were rated higher by attenders than suburban congregations in all but which one of the following areas?

- Growing spiritually
- Focusing on the community
- Meaningful worship

The correct answer is “**focusing on the community**,” which suggests that congregations in rural areas can use precisely the kind of opportunity for learning offered by the Collegeville Institute Fellows Program.

The second question was:

Percentage of rural clergy who said opportunities for professional growth and advancement help keep and attract ministers in their community.

- 24 percent
- 38 percent
- 52 percent

The correct answer is “**24 percent**.” Again, this relatively low score suggests that pastors in rural communities are hungry for the kind of professional growth opportunity offered by the Collegeville Institute Fellows Program.

To take the full quiz go to:
faithandleadership.com/features/articles/quiz-the-church-rural-america

Collegeville Institute at 50

Anniversary celebrations are just that—occasions to throw a party to mark a milestone. The Collegeville Institute has reached one such milestone as it was chartered on April 29, 1967. As a way to celebrate its 50th anniversary, a series of events will be held throughout the coming year.

The Collegeville Institute’s history is rooted in the rich ecumenical heritage of Saint John’s Abbey and University, a place shaped by the Benedictine tradition of worship and work that predates divisions of the Christian church. For a millennium and a half the Benedictine tradition has placed a strong emphasis on community and hospitality, with common prayer at the heart of the day.

In the late 1950s Saint John’s University added a course in Protestant theology to its curriculum. In a move unusual for that time, the Abbey sent a monk, Kilian McDonnell, to Germany to study at a number of ecumenical institutes and universities, including Trier, Tubingen, Munster, and Heidelberg.

Upon his return in the mid-1960s, he developed a vision for an American center of scholarly research to nurture the best of Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox theology. This center would be grounded in the Benedictine rhythm of worship and work in community.

Fr. Kilian was supported in his studies and later plans by businessman/philanthropist Patrick Butler and his wife, Aimee, of Saint Paul. This relationship was

the beginning of a tradition of collaboration between ordained and lay Christians that characterizes the Collegeville Institute’s board of directors to this day.

Another defining feature of the Collegeville Institute’s life has been a “sense of place,” a holistic ethos and atmosphere inherited from the Abbey. When the monks of Saint John’s set out to build the ecumenical center that Fr. Kilian envisioned, they located it on the shores of Stumpf Lake. The cry of loons was considered a fitting, even necessary backdrop to the work to be done. The monks insisted on the graceful architecture of Marcel Breuer, who conceived of apartments walled with windows to maximize the sense of place, in the midst of natural beauty.

After its dedication on May 29, 1968, the first scholars arrived in the fall of that year. In 1973 Fr. Kilian became president of the Collegeville Institute, a title he still holds. Dr. Robert S. Bilheimer, who arrived as executive director in 1974, consolidated the resident scholars program and created a new program of summer consultations. Beginning with the inaugural consultation, Bilheimer and the consultation co-chairs, Fr. Thomas Stransky, CSP, and Patrick Henry, pioneered a first-person method of discourse that has become the Collegeville Institute’s hallmark contribution to the ecumenical movement. Henry, who had twice been a resident scholar, was named executive director in 1984. Donald Ottenhoff began serving as executive director in 2004 and continues in that post today.

The 50th Anniversary Celebration schedule will be announced once all details have been finalized.

Staff Updates

Stina Kielsmeier-Cook was hired as the Digital Communications Specialist. She has a graduate diploma in Forced Migration and Refugee Studies from the American University in Cairo, and a B.A. in Political Science from Wheaton College.



Previously, she worked as a housing advocate for refugees. Her writing has appeared in *The Other Journal*, *The Englewood Review of Books* and *Hermeneutics*. Stina lives in Minneapolis, and she and her husband Josh are the parents of two young children.



Vivian Krueger is the Administrative and Program Assistant at the Collegeville Institute. Viv joined the Collegeville Institute in 2016 and has

worked at Saint John’s University for 23 years in several different capacities. Her responsibilities include program and facility support, hospitality, and event assistance. She has been married to her husband Randy for 35 years and they have three grown children and two grandchildren.



The Collegeville Institute’s Inaugural Logo used until 2005