DUKE DIVINITY SCHOOL RECEIVES GRANT FROM LILLY ENDOWMENT FOR YOUTH ACADEMY

DURHAM, N.C. – Duke University Divinity School has received a three-year, $1.2 million grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. for a program aimed at turning today’s high school students into tomorrow’s Christian leaders.

The Youth Academy for Christian Formation, a two-week summer program to begin in 2001, will bring 70 rising junior and senior high school students each year to study on Duke’s campus. The syllabus will combine the communal reading of ancient and modern theological texts, prayer and spiritual discipline, worship, mission and service, and reflection on contemporary social issues.

“Recent violent acts perpetrated by and against youth across our nation have been the catalyst for wide-ranging debates on how the media and the toy/game industry shape the lives and character of young people,” said the Rev. Janice A. Virtue, the divinity school’s associate dean for continuing education and strategic planning. “The Duke Youth Academy is our attempt to assist today’s youth in forming habits consistent with their Christian faith.

“The academy will be a very intense two weeks for the youth and the faculty who teach them,” said Virtue, who developed the grant proposal. “It is our hope that the conversation between youth and faculty will enable the participants to develop tools for theological reflection, moral and ethical decision making, and discernment for Christian living and vocation.”

Duke Divinity School was among several theological schools across the country invited by the endowment to create innovative programs for young people.

“We are grateful to Lilly Endowment for their generous funding of this youth academy,” said L. Gregory Jones, dean of the divinity school. “We are convinced that the church is in need of persons who will, at an early age, commit their thinking and talents to the strengthening of the Christian community. This grant provides Duke with a unique opportunity to reach some of the country’s most talented high school students and encourage them to discover a passion for practicing Christian life.”
Participants will be chosen following a national recruiting effort that will target a diverse group of Christian youth. Joining the high school students will be 22 adult mentors, several Duke faculty members, five program coordinators, a faculty dean, an academy director and a wide range of divinity school staff.

Applications for the summer 2001 academy will be available in December 2000. The cost of the two-week program, including lodging, meals, tuition and program materials, will be supported by the grant. Students will be asked to pay a $100 enrollment fee and their transportation costs, but some scholarships will be available.

Lilly Endowment, a private, Indianapolis-based foundation that supports community development, education and religion, has funded youth programs at 25 theological schools around the country.

“High school-aged young people are eager to explore the Bible and serious theology in depth, and they are excited by discovering how faith affects so many aspects of contemporary personal and community life,” said Craig Dykstra, Lilly Endowment vice president for religion.

“Lilly Endowment’s mission in the field of religion is to deepen and enrich the religious life of American Christians, primarily by helping to strengthen their churches,” he said. “Our aim in this program is to provide major support to those theological schools that can successfully find and develop a new generation of talented young Christians.”

For more information about the Youth Academy for Christian Formation, contact The Center for Continuing Education, Duke Divinity School, Box 90966, Durham, NC 27708, or call (919) 660-3448; e-mails can be sent to <div-conted@duke.edu>.

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