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For Immediate Release
March 20, 2000

Indiana church camps eligible for Lilly Endowment grant program

Things will be looking up for church camps in Indiana that are selected to participate in a new effort from Lilly Endowment: the Indiana Camp Ministries Enhancement Program.

The competitive grants program will allow church-related camps to make strategic programmatic or capital improvements -- or both -- that will further their mission of religious education and spiritual formation of young people.

“For many people the experience of attending a church camp is among the most significant in their overall formation as Christians,” said Craig Dykstra, Endowment vice president for religion. Furthermore, the church camp experience seems to be one of the most critical formative influences on people who later pursue vocations in the ordained ministry.

“Church camp can be a place where young people develop leadership abilities and a sense of personal vocation,” he noted. “Young people who have enjoyed church camps often become dedicated lay leaders in their congregations and denominations as well as influential contributors to their larger communities.”

A recent study from the Auburn Center for the Study of Theological Education shows that more than half of new seminary students have been involved in religiously related camping experiences as participants and leaders. And a church-wide strategy paper being drafted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America about young people

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and church occupations points out that, next to congregations, “outdoor ministries and camps provide one of the most significant settings for the discernment of Christian vocation.”

In the last two years, the Endowment has committed more than \$112 million in a series of national programs to encourage, develop and nurture a new generation of effective pastoral and church leaders. “This new Endowment program certainly fits into our current focus on attracting and developing promising and talented young people for the ministry and church leadership,” Dykstra said.

With the new program, church camps may apply for as much as \$600,000 in the potentially \$12 million program. “We expect there are at least 50 camps around Indiana that could apply for these grants,” Dykstra said, “and we may award up to 20 grants. Much will depend on the caliber, thoughtfulness and feasibility of the proposals.”

Those eligible to submit proposals are denominations, congregations and other charitable religious organizations that own and operate resident camp facilities in Indiana. To be eligible the camp must regularly have qualified program staff. The program is not intended for camps that primarily serve only one congregation.

The Endowment will fund only proposals that make compelling cases that a grant will result in an advance in the camp’s ability to create an effective and hospitable setting for high-quality religious education, spiritual formation, vocational discernment and leadership development.

“We have no preconceived notions of what specific projects the camps should propose,” Dykstra said. “Those out there ‘on the ground’ are the best judges of what will enhance the goals of their camp. We are eager to see what they have to say.”

Organizations interested in the program are asked to send a brief letter of intent to apply to the Endowment by Sept. 1. Completed proposals should be postmarked no later than Oct. 15 and sent to:

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An information session for interested organizations will be held at the Endowment in April. Call 317/916-7350 with questions, requests for copies of the program description and application guidelines, and to make reservations for the information session.

Recipients will be announced in December.