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Contact: Gretchen Wolfram
317/916-7304
317/255-2640 (home)
wolframg@lei.org

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36 Indiana congregations receive Lilly Endowment clergy renewal grants

Their congregations call them passionate, amazing, dedicated, energetic, prayerful, sensitive, committed, exceptional. They are the pastors of the 36 Indiana churches selected to receive grants in the 2005 Clergy Renewal Program for Indiana Congregations funded by Indianapolis-based Lilly Endowment Inc.

The grants allow them to take an extended time away from the daily demands of church leadership to spend intentional time studying, reflecting, reconnecting with their families, traveling, writing – whatever “makes their hearts sing.” At the same time, each congregation experiences its own renewal program, often in concert with its pastor’s, so that both gain from the experience.

Each congregation is eligible to receive up to \$45,000, and up to \$15,000 of that may be used to fund congregational renewal activities and for pastoral expenses while the pastor is away. The applying pastors, who are encouraged to consider plans that “will make their hearts sing,” routinely work with their congregations and come up with imaginative and thoughtful ways to spend a few months away from the pulpit.

(more)

Clergy Renewal Program for Indiana Congregations
Add 1

This year's recipients represent 24 Indiana cities and towns in 21 Indiana counties. During their sabbaticals, their "range of motion" will extend far beyond Indiana's borders – to the Middle East, Europe, Central and South America, Australia, Africa. They will explore the origins of their faith, attempt to fill in spaces on their family trees, keep journals, take pictures, spend time with their families, and pause for solitary retreats and thoughtful reflection.

"Most of these pastors, 24 to be exact, represent congregations of fewer than 400 people, and most of those, 15, represent congregations of fewer than 200. Their work is intensely personal; they spend time with people at the highest and lowest points of their lives – and all points in between," says Craig Dykstra, the Endowment's vice president for religion. "They are expected to be wise counselors, efficient administrators, effective fund-raisers, inspiring orators – and fully present whenever needed. Many have served up to two decades without taking an extended leave. They invariably describe their work as bringing great joy. These sabbaticals give them the opportunity to refresh and renew themselves for their service ahead.

"The congregations – who design and plan these sabbaticals with their ministers – recognize that they sometimes have grown too comfortable with a situation in which 'the pastor will take care of that.' At the same time, they are more than willing – when sabbatical opportunities such as this come along – to 'pick up the pace' and fill in while their pastor is away. Indeed, most become enthusiastic when given this opportunity to take leadership roles. They see the chance to renew themselves as a congregation while the pastor is away," Dykstra says. "Many congregations engage in renewal activities on the same theme as their pastor's renewal program. For instance, if the pastor is involved in a foreign-language immersion program, the congregation might engage in a study of the same culture that the pastor is exploring. Or if the pastor is exploring different modes of worship, they too will plan correlating studies. The opportunities for mutual renewal are endless."

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Clergy Renewal Program for Indiana Congregations
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Born in the Dominican Republic, the Rev. Alfredo R. Williams has for the past five years worked to develop the Hispanic Mission for Christ Church Cathedral, the landmark Episcopal church on Monument Circle in Indianapolis. He has been a personal, one-on-one mission of bringing people to the church, and today he describes a “beautiful and multicultural Spanish-speaking congregation” of about 70 members at the church.

Before coming to Indianapolis, he served as a missionary in his homeland, Ecuador and Mexico. Now he, his wife and their children will return to Mexico to reunite with her family and visit the homes of relatives of the Indianapolis congregation. They will visit cities and towns across Mexico, and he will spend a week in retreat at the Theological Community of Mexico seminary. This will be his first sabbatical rest in his 24 years of ordained ministry, and he looks forward to traveling without the pressure of having to return immediately and to taking the time to read, connect with nature, meditate, and learn other cultures more deeply.

The Rev. Stephen T. Brown of St. Rita Roman Catholic Church in Indianapolis also will head south next summer – to Sao Paulo, Brazil, for two weeks of language study (Portuguese) and cultural enrichment with a private tutor. Then he will participate in an Afro-Brazilian Theological Study Program, the Sankofa Observance in the Western Hemisphere where there are 100 million Catholics of African descent. The Sankofa Observance, which commemorates the first African slaves’ arrival in the Americas in 1502, draws outstanding writers, cultural leaders and artists of the Afro-Brazilian Catholic Community.

His congregation has been involved in the bridge-building process with Catholics of the African Diaspora, and it led the first bilingual liturgy to bring African Americans and Latinos together in Indianapolis. For the past 15 years, St. Rita has been incorporating African culture and spirituality in liturgy and worship.

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Clergy Renewal Program for Indiana Congregations
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Rev. Brown will begin his sabbatical by traveling to Akron, Ohio, to visit his parents and then further his proficiency in the ancient liturgical languages of Aramaic and Syriac with the Maronite Antonine Sisters of the Shrine of Our Lady of Lebanon in Youngstown, Ohio.

He will conclude his sabbatical with a two-week rest at the Camoldoli Hermitage in Big Sur, Calif., before returning to his parish of 400 families in near-downtown Indianapolis.

Dennis A. Hammons has been a pastor for 31 years, the last 10 at the 300-member Shawnee Heights Baptist Church in Muncie. Although he has attended many continuing education events and completed his doctor of ministry degree, he has never been on an extended sabbatical.

Next summer will be different. He and his family will embark on a three-month period that will include about three weeks in Italy, combining their family talents of linguistics, computer science, archaeological conservation, teaching and social studies, into a tentatively titled project called Monuments and Mosaics. Their canvas will be Rome, Ravenna, Venice and Naples.

Later he and his wife will spend a week in Prague to focus on faith in a secular context. Then it will be on to England with a summer course at Oxford and visits to Bath, Stratford-on-Avon, Salisbury and London. They will conclude their sabbatical with a week at Green Lake, Wis., their family's "favorite place on earth and a perfect end to a perfect summer."

The Revs. Phil and Mary Mininger are co-pastors of the 75-member Paoli Mennonite Fellowship in the rolling hills of Orange County. The congregation was founded 30 years ago by four young Mennonite couples from the Indiana University School of Medicine who agreed to move to the then-medically underserved county.

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Clergy Renewal Program for Indiana Congregations
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Today, the Miningers and their congregation hope to follow the encouragement of the national Mennonite church and “find their place in the broader fellowship” of the Mennonite World Conference. Many in their congregation have served in cross-cultural settings.

Next summer, the Miningers will head for El Salvador with a young couple from the congregation who served there with the Mennonite Central Committee in community and youth leadership development. Then they – along with their three daughters and a son-in-law – will go to Guatemala for a week. Their renewal program also calls for times of separate retreats: Mary at Gethsemani Abbey in Kentucky and Phil at Loyola University in Chicago.

The Miningers are new empty-nesters, and they will look back a generation to honor their parents and extended families with special times together. Both their fathers are retired pastors. Topsail Beach, N.C., will be the July destination for Phil’s family, and Colorado Springs will be the August destination for a reunion with Mary’s family. After a week in Albuquerque at the Center for Action and Contemplation, Phil and Mary will return to Paoli.

They define their congregation as “a good fit which has supported them well.” They don’t worry too much about being gone because the congregation is “strong, stable and diverse with a ‘deep bench’ of seasoned lay leadership.”

The roughly 400 members of the Community United Methodist Church in Vincennes plan to celebrate their accomplishments and concentrate on how to build on and practice healthy forms of discipleship in the future, while their pastor, the Rev. Andrew D. Kinsey, renews his engagement with the teachings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The writings of the German Lutheran minister, who was executed in Germany shortly before the end of World War II, had a profound effect on the University of Evansville student in 1985. He saw how Bonhoeffer’s struggle opened up forms of renewal in the church during a time of crisis.

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Clergy Renewal Program for Indiana Congregations
Add 5

Key to a renewal leave, he believes, will be a Bonhoeffer Study/Travel Tour next May in celebration of Bonhoeffer's 100th birthday anniversary. The tour will include sites from Bonhoeffer's life, to study a person "who drank deeply from the well of Christ's love to the bitter end." After a trip to Poland, he will be joined by his wife and three children for travel to southwestern Germany to visit communities connected to their family histories.

After returning from Germany, the family will head for Montana for some hiking, canoeing and cycling. En route, Kinsey would like to meet with writers Eugene Peterson and Kathleen Norris who have addressed issues of geography and spirituality.

Kinsey's renewal will conclude with a trip to the Gonzaga Eastern Point Retreat Center in Gloucester, Mass., for most of July. While in the area he would like to meet writers such as Jessica Stern and Pulitzer Prize-winning Samantha Power who have written about terror, war and genocide.

"All these congregations have given their pastors and their families the 'green light' to renew themselves and to return to the roots of their ministries, to the sources and resources that led them into ministry in the first place," says Dykstra. "The Endowment is most pleased that the program has resulted in rejuvenated pastors returning to enthusiastic parishioners. This group will bring to more than 200 the number of Indiana congregations that have participated in the program since 1999."

The congregations and pastors selected for the 2005 program are the following:

Bethel United Methodist Church, Indianapolis, \$45,000
Andrea L. Leininger

Broadway United Methodist Church, Indianapolis, \$45,000
Rachel M. Metheny

Central Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Seymour, \$44,670
Sam R. Davenport

Christ Church Cathedral (Episcopal), Indianapolis, \$38,278
Alfredo R. Williams

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Clergy Renewal Program for Indiana Congregations
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Community United Methodist Church, Vincennes, \$45,000
Andrew D. Kinsey

Congregation Beth Shalom, Bloomington Jewish Community (Jewish Reform),
\$45,000
Mira B. Wasserman

East Goshen Mennonite Church, \$45,000
Merle G. Hostetler

Fairview Baptist Church (Southern Baptist Convention), Kokomo, \$42,597
Steven R. Sherwood

Fellowship Missionary Church, Fort Wayne, \$44,841
David N. DeSelm

First Presbyterian Church (Presbyterian Church USA), Bloomington, \$44,900
Mary E. Jensen

First United Methodist Church, Anderson, \$45,000
Derek C. Weber

Geist Community Baptist Church (Independent Christian), McCordsville, \$44,992
L. Todd Townsend

Grace United Methodist Church of South Bend, \$39,203
Hosea W. Drake

Liberty Chapel Church (nondenominational), Crawfordsville, \$45,000
A. Allen Sparks

Lynn Friends Meeting, \$45,000
William Medlin

Methodist Temple United Methodist Church, Evansville, \$42,350
Robert P. Coleman

Mount Helm Missionary Baptist Church, Indianapolis, \$40,182
Winford R. Goodner

Mount Pleasant United Methodist Church, Terre Haute, \$44,987
Aaron E. Wheaton

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Clergy Renewal Program for Indiana Congregations
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North Leo Mennonite Church, \$44,717
Douglas J. Zehr

Northview Christian Life Church (Independent Christian), Carmel, \$44,780
Steve Poe

Paoli Mennonite Fellowship, \$45,000
Phil and Mary Mininger

Peru Grace Brethren Church, \$44,930
Ronald L. Bowland

Plymouth Congregational Church of Fort Wayne (United Church of Christ),
\$44,407
John P. Gardner

Ridge United Methodist Church, Munster, \$45,000
Steven M. Conger

Risen Lord Church (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America [ELCA]),
Greenwood, \$44,200
R. Michael Brown

St. Christopher Catholic Church, Indianapolis, \$45,000
D. Michael Welch

St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church (Lutheran Church/Missouri Synod), Fort
Wayne, \$45,000
Steven M. Ahlersmeyer

St. Rita Roman Catholic Church, Indianapolis, \$26,930
Stephan T. Brown

Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCA), Indianapolis, \$40,075
Laurin G. Vance

Seventh and Eighth United Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Indianapolis,
\$45,000
Jeffrey R. Castetter

(more)

Clergy Renewal Program for Indiana Congregations
Add 8

Shawnee Heights Baptist Church (American Baptist), Muncie, \$44,975
Dennis A. Hammons

The Promise: A United Methodist Church, Fishers, \$43,990
Russell F. Allanson

Union Center Church of the Brethren, Nappanee, \$44,706
Ruth A. Yoder

Vineyard Community Church (nondenominational), Greenwood, \$45,000
Jim D. Bricker

Wabash Avenue Presbyterian Church (Presbyterian Church USA),
Crawfordsville, \$44,254
John C. Van Nuys

Zionsville Presbyterian Church (Presbyterian Church USA), \$24,150
Glenn W. McDonald

Endowment officials anticipate that the Indiana program will continue, and an announcement is expected soon.

Besides this program, the Endowment offers a National Clergy Renewal Program for congregations and their ministers in the other 49 states. The deadline for those applications is June 10, and the recipients will be announced in September. For more information about either program, see the Endowment's Web site:

www.lillyendowment.org.