



(Note to media: Naturally, the Endowment would appreciate your notice of this program in your publication/broadcast. Beyond that, of course, if you know of any pastors and/or congregation members who may be interested in the renewal program, please feel free to share this information with them.)

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For Immediate Release
August 18, 2005

Lilly Endowment announces 8th year of Indiana clergy renewal program

Next spring up to 40 more congregations will join the more than 200 that already have been selected in Lilly Endowment's Clergy Renewal Program for Indiana Congregations. Any Indiana congregation with an ordained pastor is eligible to apply for the program which allows pastors to go on sabbaticals that may take them around the world or around the state on intentional "sabbaticals" to renew their energies and their faith.

2006 will be the eighth year for the popular program that also enables the congregations to "take up the slack" and recruit help to perform duties that the pastor usually performs, explore new avenues of faith and community, study subjects in conjunction with their pastor, and cultivate and develop new leadership.

"Pastors' ordinary schedules may leave them little time to think and reflect on their ministries," said Craig Dykstra, the Endowment's senior vice president for religion. "The renewal program, which is designed by the pastor together with the lay leaders of the congregation, is intended to allow the pastor to get away for a substantial period of time and get in touch with the deep motivations and essential sources of energy that led him or her to the ministry in the first place.

(more)

Clergy Renewal Program for Indiana Congregations
Add 1

“Many people do not realize that good pastors are generally very busy people who perform many diverse duties—from preaching to pastoral care to institutional development,” Dykstra said. “Many if not most of them have never taken a sabbatical or even extended vacations. These are not ‘burnt-out’ pastors, but hard-working people whose duties have left them little time to stop – just stop – for a while and ‘regroup.’ As one pastor told us after his sabbatical, ‘If you think you’re too busy to get away, you’re busier than you need to be. The renewal program can help you understand that.’”

Pastors use the sabbatical time to travel various parts of the world, re-engage with family and friends, study topics that intrigued them earlier in their lives, start a new hobby or revive an old one, get out of their “comfort zones” and explore a completely new environment, study other churches and missions – a wide variety of activities that stimulate their imaginations and renew their spirits. “While I returned rested and refreshed, I also returned highly charged and somehow more resolved,” reported one. “It has been an amazing and life-changing journey.”

Each congregation is eligible for a grant of up to \$45,000. Up to \$15,000 of the grant may be used to help the congregation fulfill pastoral duties during the pastor’s absence or to support activities that enable the congregation to be renewed in its ministry. The deadline for applications is Jan. 31, 2006. Recipients will be announced in May.

“The application process is not an easy one,” Dykstra cautions. “It takes the intentional collaboration of the pastor, his or her family, and the congregation to design a renewal program that is a result of the shared vision. That way there are no ‘surprises’ for either side.”

Most congregations say that they have enjoyed the process. “Our congregation grew closer together and closer to our pastor during the sabbatical process,” reported one.

Because 2006 will mark the eighth year since this program began, the Endowment feels that some pastors who benefited from grants in the earliest years may be ready for

(more)

Clergy Renewal Program for Indiana Congregations
Add 2

another renewal program. Therefore, the 2006 renewal program is open to support pastors who engaged in clergy renewal activities in 1999 or 2000. Seven years should have passed between the pastor's return from a former renewal program and the beginning of a proposed renewal program in 2007 or 2008. Prospective parties should carefully check the brochure/application for their eligibility.

Interested persons may gain access to the brochure/application by going to the Endowment's Web site, www.lillyendowment.org, and clicking on Religion.

An information meeting about the program for Indiana pastors, their spouses and congregational representatives will be held Oct. 4 from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. at North United Methodist Church, 3808 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis. Those who would like to attend may return the invitation card that accompanies the application, print the invitation card off the Endowment's Web site, e-mail indianaclergyrenewal@yahoo.com, or call 317/916-7350.

(The Endowment also supports the National Clergy Renewal Program which includes congregations and pastors in the other 49 states.)