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2008 will be 10th year for popular Indiana clergy renewal program

Lilly Endowment Inc. has announced that the popular Indiana Clergy Renewal Program will continue for its 10th year. So far, more than 280 Indiana congregations have received grants that have enabled them to send their ministers far and wide on voyages of renewal and refreshment. The congregations, too, through their own programs and plans during the sabbaticals often experience renewed energy and purpose.

Through the program the Endowment offers up to 40 grants of up to \$45,000 each to support renewal programs for pastors of Indiana congregations. Up to \$15,000 of that amount may be used to help the congregation fulfill pastoral duties during the pastor's absence and/or to support renewal activities for the congregation itself.

“It can go unrecognized – even among some members of congregations – that good pastors are usually very busy people who perform many diverse duties,” said Craig Dykstra, the Endowment's senior vice president for religion. “Most of them have never taken a sabbatical. These are not ‘burned-out’ pastors but hard-working people whose duties have left them little time to stop – just stop – for a while. 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.’”

With these grants, pastors travel to places anywhere in the world, explore the historical traditions of their denominations, renew family and friendship ties, read, write, worship and pray – whatever helps them draw more deeply on the sources of renewal that give them energy and sustain them in their ministries.

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“These are intentional times of replenishment,” Dykstra stressed. “They are not vacations. Successful proposals combine a sense of coherence among the proposed activities, usually drawn together in a thematic unity that is apparent in the proposal. This is not a fill-in-the-blanks application. It takes time for the pastor and congregation to put together a well-thought-out plan. Among the proposals there is a great deal of variety, but the point is always renewal – of body, mind, and spirit – in the deepest possible sense.”

One pastor echoed Dykstra’s statement. “The most prevalent impact on the congregation was that we bonded beyond any expectations we could have had. By working together and intentionally putting God and the church first, we grew as one and accomplished things that we were not sure were possible,” he said.

The program is open to all Indiana congregations that have an ordained pastor. Also, if a pastor has benefited from a previous clergy renewal program grant received in or before 2002, that pastor’s current congregation is eligible to apply for a grant to support a second renewal for that pastor.

Applications must be postmarked by Jan. 29, 2008, and recipients will be notified by late May 2008.

An information meeting about the program for Indiana pastors, their spouses and congregational representatives will be held Sept. 27 from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. at North United Methodist Church, 3808 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis. Those who would like to attend should fill out the invitation card that accompanies the application (or that is available on the Endowment’s website) and return it to the Endowment by Sept. 20.

For details about the information meeting or to gain access to the application brochure, interested persons should view the Endowment’s website, www.lillyendowment.org and click on Religion; call 317/916-7350; e-mail indianaclergyrenewal@yahoo.com; or write Jean M. Smith, Program Director, Lilly Endowment, 2801 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis, Ind. 46208.

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