



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

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Lilly Endowment announces 7th season for National Clergy Renewal Program

Lilly Endowment Inc. announces that its popular National Clergy Renewal Program will continue for a seventh year. The Indianapolis-based Endowment offers grants of up to \$45,000 to congregations across the country to allow their pastors to spend some time away from the daily demands of parish ministry.

“Pastors and congregations both benefit from this period of renewal,” said Craig Dykstra, Endowment senior vice president for religion. “The pastors are given a rare opportunity to dig deep into what ‘makes their hearts sing.’ The renewal and refreshment of a pastor’s heart is key to the spiritual vitality of a congregation’s life. That is why we suggest that, before they move too quickly to figure out the details of their renewal proposal, pastors reflect carefully about what kinds of experiences will touch them most deeply.”

Most pastors end up spending three to four months away from their churches, and their experiences both open their minds to new possibilities and also connect them more deeply with what really matters to them. They travel the world, study things they really care about, and reconnect with family and friends from years past.

“As they explore the roots of their religious traditions, write poetry, practice contemplative prayer, and spend weeks or months in significantly different cultural contexts,” Dykstra said, “they come to see their ministries with fresh eyes. At the same time, the congregations often come to see their pastors and themselves in a new way as well. The planning process itself gives them a better understanding of what their pastors

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do, and their appreciation for them grows. Sometimes congregations decide to undertake a spiritual journey of their own alongside the pastor; they may read some of the same books the pastor is reading or form discussion groups around the sabbatical theme. Comments from former recipients prove to us that both pastors and congregations find the whole experience empowering and exciting.”

As many as 120 congregations will be selected for the 2006 program, joining the more than 600 that have received grants since 2000. While each grant proposal may request up to \$45,000, up to \$15,000 of that may be used for congregational activities during the pastor’s absence.

The brochure/application is available on the Endowment’s Web site, www.lillyendowment.org. Interested persons may call 317/916-7350, e-mail clergyrenewal@yahoo.com, or write Lilly Endowment, 2801 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis, Ind. 46208.

Completing the application requires a joint effort of the pastor and congregation; applicants are encouraged not to put off applying until the last minute. “The process takes some time,” cautions Dykstra. “It involves intentional and purposeful discussion between the congregation and the pastor. It is not just a form that can be filled out overnight. We have found, however, that – even among congregations that did not receive grants – the application process itself helped them focus on issues such as effective leadership, the future directions of the congregation, and the like.”

Also on the Endowment’s Web site are two documents that applicants may find helpful: *What Makes a High-Quality Proposal?* and *Grace Notes*. Both the brochure and the Web site also suggest possible reading materials for interested persons.

To be eligible, ministers must have earned at least a master of divinity degree. The program is open to all Christian congregations in 49 states and the District of Columbia. (The Endowment administers a separate, similar program for Indiana congregations.)

The deadline for proposals is May 15, 2006.