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Lilly Endowment to continue popular National Clergy Renewal Program

With last month's announcement of the recipients of grants in Lilly Endowment's National Clergy Renewal Program, more than 700 congregations have had the opportunity to design and carry out periods of renewal for their pastors. The Endowment is pleased to announce that the popular program will continue for an eighth year, when up to 120 congregations will be selected to participate in 2007.

"Pastors and congregations both benefit from this period of renewal," said Craig Dykstra, Endowment senior vice president for religion. "They are given a rare chance to get away from the demands of daily parish ministry and explore 'what makes their hearts sing.' The renewal of a pastor's heart and spirituality is part of his or her 'job description' and is essential to the spiritual quality 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 and connect them most closely with the enthusiasm that led them to the ministry in the first place," he said.

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

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

As many as 120 congregations will be chosen for the 2007 program. 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 the 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.”

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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 be ordained and have earned a master of divinity degree from an accredited theological seminary or divinity school. 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, 2007.