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Lilly Endowment offers up to \$25 million for program to “Sustain Pastoral Excellence”

Lilly Endowment’s religion grantmaking is guided by a central conviction: Local congregations are crucial institutions, and the pastors who lead them need and deserve support for sustaining excellent work.

The local congregation is where “it all comes together.” It is the place where the passions and concerns of parishioners encounter the good news of the gospel, where theology hits the road and travels the highway of human reality. And it is where the Christian pastor lives and works.

A faithful and effective leader in a local community of faith needs to be skillful in a wide range of roles: compelling preacher, compassionate friend, effective fund-raiser, strong civic leader, administrative whiz, public relations master, excellent teacher. Given the demands, it is easy for conscientious pastors to get so caught up with the press of daily work that they lose sight of what called them to the ministry in the first place.

“Therefore, it is most important that good pastors have ways to sustain their calling, to keep their ‘eyes on the prize’ of ministerial excellence,” said Craig Dykstra, Endowment vice president for religion. “It often is difficult to do this in isolation from others who share the same concerns.”

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Sustaining Pastoral Excellence Add 1

To encourage good pastors to find ways to maintain their energy and enthusiasm, the Endowment announces “Sustaining Pastoral Excellence,” an open competitive grants program of up to \$25 million for organizations concerned with the state of the Christian ministry in the United States.”

Any organization with public charity status in the United States that believes it is prepared to establish or enhance projects to provide Christian pastors with opportunities to sustain excellence in pastoral ministry is invited to apply. Qualified organizations range from colleges to theological schools, from denominational judicatories to church conference centers and ministry development centers, and from congregations to nonprofit organizations with an interest in the ministry.

The Endowment will award grants ranging from \$250,000 to \$2 million for organizations to use over a three- to five-year period.

“We are interested in learning from applicants what they think constitutes good pastoral ministry,” Dykstra said. “What experiences most help pastors sustain excellence in their ministries throughout a lifetime of faithful service? What organizations are best positioned to support pastors well and to implement programs that will provide them with opportunities essential for maintaining healthy and vital ministries? These are the key questions to which this grants program seeks to find answers.”

Endowment officials have been talking with pastors over the last several years about practices they say help them keep up their energy, interest and devotion to the pastoral life. Their collective responses include the following elements:

- ◆ regular engagement in spiritual disciplines
- ◆ periodic time apart from the congregation
- ◆ participation in ongoing biblical and theological study with colleagues
- ◆ fostering sustainable friendships with colleagues and developing peer networks

(more)

Sustaining Pastoral Excellence
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- ◆ regular effort to hone the fundamental practices of ministry to a high level of competence
- ◆ honor and recognition for their ministries and those of their congregations

Interested parties may learn more about the program by contacting its Web site: www.pastoralexcellence.org. They also may request a copy of the Request for Proposals brochure by calling 317/916-7351 or writing Lilly Endowment, 2801 N. Meridian St., P.O. Box 88068, Indianapolis, Ind., 46208.

Grant proposals must be postmarked no later than June 15, 2002. Notification of grant awards will be made by Oct. 1, 2002.