

## First Congregational Church United Church of Christ in Moline receives Lilly grant

Written by Rev. Allen Mothershed  
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First Congregational Church United Church of Christ in Moline has received a grant of \$40,953 to enable its Senior Pastor Allen Mothershed to participate in the 2010 National Clergy Renewal Program funded by the Indianapolis-based Lilly Endowment Inc. It is one of 150 congregations across the country that will support their ministers in the program, which allows pastors to step back from their busy lives and renew their spirits for the benefit of their ongoing ministries. Now in its 11th year, the program invites Christian congregations and ministers to consider and plan a period of intentional reflection and renewal. It provides a time for ministers to take a break from their daily obligations and gain the fresh perspective and renewed energy that a carefully considered "sabbath time" of travel, study, rest and prayer can provide.

Each congregation is eligible to apply for a grant of up to \$50,000. Up to \$15,000 of that amount can be used to fulfill pastoral duties during the minister's absence and for expenses related to the congregation's own renewal. The 150 grants this year total \$6.4 million.

First Congregational Church considers this extended time of study by Pastor Mothershed and the congregation a part of its commitment to take seriously the need for faith formation in the lives of both staff and church members. Pastor Mothershed will be spending a week of study in Rome, Italy and then travel with his family to one of the spiritually rich places in the world, Assisi, Italy, the birth place of St. Francis of Assisi. He will spend mornings in prayer, study, and writing at Alle Porte del Paradiso ~ At the Gates of Paradise, a farm retreat center just outside of Assisi. In the afternoons, he will have time with his family to hike, cook, work in a vineyard, visit with overseas friends, and explore the surrounding area. First Congregational Church is also on a parallel time of extended study. All members and guest are receiving a book, Practicing Our Faith, by Dorothy Bass, with a chapter a month being the focus of study and activities for a year.

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This year's group includes congregations in 40 states and the District of Columbia. In the mix are congregations of many sizes - some as small as 50 members, others as large as 1,000 present at Sunday worship services. The oldest church - First Presbyterian Church of Smithtown, Pa. - traces its heritage back to 1675 when the first meeting house was build. The newest congregation - Living Water Christian Church in Parkville, Mo. - first "congregated" on Easter Sunday, 2004.

The 2010 class of grantees brings to 1440 the number of congregations that have received clergy renewal grants since 2000. "We ask these congregations and ministers to consider the question, "What will make your heart sing?," as they devise their plans." said Craig Dykstra, senior vice president for religion at the Endowment. "They never fail to come up with wonderful and imaginative yet doable ways to fulfill their dreams. Their time away has freed them up to pursue personal interests and needs in a ways that has given them new energy for ministry - and the congregations have discovered that they too experience a refreshment of their own and a newfound sense of their own strengths."