

**BATON ROUGE PRIEST TOMMY DILLON RECEIVES LOUISIANA'S  
SOLE CLERGY SABBATICAL GRANT IN  
2019 NATIONAL CLERGY RENEWAL PROGRAM**

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BATON ROUGE, La. (October 11, 2019) St. Margaret's Episcopal Church has received a grant of nearly \$50,000 to enable its rector, the Rev. Tommy J Dillon II, to participate in the 2019 National Clergy Renewal Program. St. Margaret's is one of 150 congregations across the United States, and the only congregation in Louisiana, selected to participate in this competitive grant program, which is funded by Lilly Endowment Inc. and administered by Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis. Established by the Endowment in 2000, the program's grants allow Christian congregations to support their pastors with the gift of extended time away from their ministerial duties and responsibilities.

Ministers whose congregations are awarded the grants use their time away from the demands of daily ministry to engage in reflection and renewal. The approach respects the "Sabbath time" concept, offering ministers a carefully considered respite that may include travel, study, rest, prayer and immersive arts and cultural experiences.

"I am immensely grateful to the Lilly Endowment Inc., and to the wonderful people of St. Margaret's, for the chance to recharge and refuel my passion for ministry," Dillon said. "In visiting sites that are important to both Mary, the mother of Jesus, and to my own ministry, I pray that I will return to St. Margaret's with a renewed energy for the work God has given us to do in Baton Rouge."

Through the National Clergy Renewal Program, congregations apply for grants of up to \$50,000 to support renewal programs for their pastors. Collaborative in nature and implementation, the program allows congregations to partner with their ministers in developing experiences that address their unique renewal needs and aspirations. Recognizing that ministers' families are subject to the stress and demands placed on pastoral leaders, the program encourages pastors to involve their families in renewal activities. Congregational needs during the minister's renewal experience also are considered. Up to \$15,000 of the grant may be used to support interim pastoral leadership during the pastor's retreat, as well as renewal activities within the congregation. Since the National Clergy Renewal Program's inception, more than 2,800 congregations have participated in the program, including the 150 congregations receiving grants in 2019.

As part of his sabbatical from May 1-July 31, 2020, Father Dillon will travel to Mexico, San Francisco and Spain for relaxation, study and prayer. He will visit the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City, the magnificent ruins of the civilization of Teotihuacá, Grace Cathedral and natural wonders in San Francisco, sites in and around Barcelona and finishing at the famous statue of the

“Black Madonna” on the sacred mount of Montserrat. During his travels, he will be joined by clergy colleagues, friends and family and will pursue spiritual direction, Spanish enrichment and discernment.

Upon returning to St. Margaret’s, the congregation will join Father Dillon in marking their sacred journey together with a symbolic pilgrimage around the grounds of St. Margaret’s to mark the Feast of St. Mary the Godbearer, led by the Right Rev. Morris Thompson, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana on August 16. During Father Dillon’s sabbatical, pastoral oversight of St. Margaret’s will be provided by the Very Rev. Ron Clingenpeel, a longtime friend of both the parish and the rector.

St. Margaret’s applied for the Clergy Renewal Program with the complete support of the vestry (governing body) and the bishop.

Ordained in 2003, Father Dillon has served as rector of St. Margaret’s since 2016 after serving parishes in Bainbridge Island, Wash., San Francisco and Baton Rouge. He is a graduate and trustee of the General Theological Seminary in New York City and graduate of Yale Divinity School, and under his leadership Sunday attendance at St. Margaret’s has doubled, and the parish is buzzing with a palpable sense of energy and outreach for the community.

“Pastors play an important role in nourishing the spiritual lives of individuals and in guiding the work of the Christian congregations they serve,” said Christopher L. Coble, Lilly Endowment’s vice president for religion. “Through these grants, we seek to honor pastors for their extraordinary service and enable them to engage in a brief period of rest and renewal. We have learned that such experiences invigorate the leadership of pastors and bring new vitality to their congregations as well.”

The Rev. Dr. Robert Saler, research fellow and director of the Lilly Endowment Clergy Renewal Programs, noted that the National Clergy Renewal Program integrates key attributes of healthy congregations, including a mutual respect for the renewal needs of both ministers and the congregations they serve.

“The program provides an opportunity for congregations to express appreciation for their ministers’ service and leadership,” Saler said. “At a time when leaders are often praised for their pace of innovation and productivity, the National Clergy Renewal Program pays homage to the timeless wisdom embedded in the practice of reflection and renewal.”

Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis directs the Lilly Endowment Clergy Renewal Program for Indiana Congregations and a second program for congregations across the United States through its Center for Pastoral Excellence.