

Highlights from the Lilly Grant Application

Lilly Grant: Begin with a summary statement describing the overall character and purpose of the renewal program you are proposing.

Our Sabbatical Vision: Hands-on mission in partnership with Presbyterians in the southern state of Chiapas, Mexico has been a cornerstone of our church's core ministry and a passion for our people for more than a dozen years. More than a third of our 330 members have traveled. More than \$150,000 has been invested. We envision personal, pastoral and congregational renewal through bringing our passion for ministry in Mexico home to a partnership with our local Hispanic community.

The Plan: The Lily Endowment grant will enable the exploration and nurture of multicultural mission and leadership to which we feel called by providing time and resources for Rev. Utley to:

- 1) Learn Spanish through an intensive language immersion experience,
- 2) Observe and participate in the Mexican-Mayan-Presbyterian culture of central Chiapas,
- 3) Strengthen and build new relationships with our partners in the Tzeltal Synod through shared mission projects, and
- 4) Come home with enhanced skills for partnership with our Hispanic partners and neighbors in the central Piedmont of North Carolina.

Lilly Grant: Provide a clearly articulated rationale for engaging in the clergy renewal program. In doing so, please give careful thought to the connection between the purpose, the proposed activities and your rationale. Programs that are coherent, well-integrated and possess a degree of thematic unity often are the most compelling. Your responses to these first two questions should convey these characteristics. Also, include a discussion about why this is an appropriate time for the pastor and congregation to participate.

We have seen for ourselves and Rev. Utley has articulated what makes his "heart sing": learning anything new, connecting with people, traveling with an experience of local life and culture, and doing hands-on mission. Our proposal provides for Rev. Utley's renewal needs and our congregation's call to extend our mission.

The Timing: We are a "transitional church" and understand the high rate of burnout of lay leaders and clergy in churches our size. So, we included a sabbatical leave in Rev. Utley's terms of call, giving it increased attention over the last fifteen months. We anticipate that this sabbatical will serve to renew Dr. Utley's energy and vision for a challenging ministry while enabling us to follow a ministry path we have discerned as our call to serve. We are a strong, growing church and enjoy a strong, healthy relationship with Rev. Utley and are excited about the future with him.

Why This Proposal? We share with our pastor a passion for mission in southern Mexico. As our new pastor, he made his first pilgrimage with us in 2006 and caught the vision. Since then, he has become a leader in this ministry with local, presbytery, and national involvements. However, he is keenly aware of his limits due to inadequate Spanish language skills and limited cultural understanding. This sabbatical is designed to become a catalyst for next steps in both his ministry and ours.

The Essential Components

Educational renewal: Ten weeks of Spanish language and Mexican cultural immersion to provide language skills and cultural understanding that will enable our ministry together.

Ministry renewal: Time, guidance, and technology to launch a DVD education ministry for course materials in the Tzeltal language of Central Chiapas, Mexico.

Spiritual Renewal. A two-week period in San Cristobal for a silent meditation retreat and Holy Week worship services, and a week for reflection and writing upon his return to North Carolina.

Family and Relationship Renewal: Leading their first mission trip for members from Rev. Utley's first church and enabling his family to participate in the ministry that is so important to Rev. Utley's life and ministry.

Lilly grant: Provide a statement written by the pastor that describes the intended benefits, both for the pastor and for the congregation, of the program as planned.

The congregation will benefit in several ways. 1) The congregation experiences a needed catalyst for bringing international mission home to North Carolina. Their local mission awareness will grow as a result of the renewal activities in which they will be engaged while I am away. 2) Our lay leaders will grow in their leadership skills and faith as I am gone during an active season of the church, and we have important building considerations on the agenda. 3) The congregation will enjoy and benefit from new voices in preaching. 4) Finally, we will pray for each other. Prayer changes and strengthens us, moving us toward the will of God for our lives.

As for me, I love learning, meeting and connecting with people, and I find helping others to be energizing. For me, a change of pace is better than complete rest. Engaging with people in mission is the most energizing part of my call. The sabbatical frees me from ordinary duties and allows me to simplify and focus my life on these opportunities for mission that I love. I cannot adequately describe my hope and anticipation of my family joining me in Chiapas. They have observed the Mexico mission transform my life and ministry, something they cannot fully understand until they go. Making that possible would be a gift that cannot be measured.

Lilly grant: Provide a similar statement of intended benefits, both for the congregation and for the pastor, written by a representative of the congregation. This statement should summarize the congregation's views and should be incorporated into the body of the proposal.

In its 17 years of existence, Oak Ridge Presbyterian Church (ORPC) has been heavily involved in Mexico missions. We have formed close personal connections over the years, and now send two teams a year to work with our friends in Chiapas. Although ostensibly to help fund and provide labor for various construction projects, we realize the personal connections and very concrete sharing of our common faith are the true products. This focus is a very important segment of our church's mission efforts.

When Pastor Utley told us he wanted to use his sabbatical further develop our church's connection with friends in Mexico, we were thrilled. The culture and language learning is an important step in enhancing our future mission effectiveness. During our years of Mexico mission, we have become aware of the need for trained pastors and lay leaders to support the growing rural protestant churches in Chiapas. Dr. Utley's experience and gift for teaching provide the perfect opportunity to fill this additional mission direction. His demonstrated skill in training new pastors and lay leaders, and his open and gregarious style will help him to be especially effective. Pastor Utley is invigorated through coaching and teaching situations. This sabbatical will provide him both a clear departure from present responsibilities and a truly energizing experience.

During the proposed sabbatical, ORPC will experience and prepare for a renewed focus on Local Mission. The combination of our church's human resources and our location in semi-rural North Carolina provide clear opportunity to reach out to our Hispanic neighbors in Christ. Although passionate about mission in Chiapas, our mostly white, upper middle class congregation hasn't naturally connected with local Hispanic churches and our immigrant neighbors. We realize that goal will require very deliberate, focused and achievable actions. Pastor Utley's sabbatical proposal, and the accompanying proposed church leadership support during his absence, will be the catalyst for that kind of move. We know that the vision stated in the proposal will have a lasting impact on our entire community and will continue to be supported for many years to come.

Lilly grant: Tell us how the pastor and the congregation will communicate and share insights from the renewal program with one another at the conclusion of the renewal program.

We expect that Rev. Utley and the congregation will share their mutual experiences and insights in the congregational meal and celebration on the 3rd Sunday of May, then as we plan for the Vacation Bible School, and again during the Mission Committee Retreat in July. We also fully anticipate that Rev. Utley's preaching will be informed by his sabbatical insights. We expect that a specially appointed Sabbatical Committee, the Session, and Rev. Utley will share insights about the leadership functions in his absence and the insights we can carry into the future. Finally, Rev. Utley plans to share a blog that is open to the congregation. Technologically savvy people are considering a virtual greeting one or two Sundays via Skype.