

## Rector awarded a \$28,000 grant

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By Teri S. Merrill

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**WINCHESTER**--- Summer is traditionally a time when people take a break from their hectic lives and find refuge in travel or other means of relaxation.

One local church will have an extended time of renewal and reflection this summer as its rector takes a three-month sabbatical, part of a competitive grant awarded by the Indianapolis-based Lilly Endowment Inc.

The Rev. Dr. Hilary B. Smith, rector of St. Paul's on-the-Hill Episcopal Church on Senseny Road, was recently awarded a \$28,000 grant through the endowment's National Clergy Renewal Program.

This highly sought-after grant supports extended periods of reflection and renewal for pastors in parish ministries, so they can step back from their busy lives and gain a fresh perspective and renewed energy, according to the Lilly Endowment.

Across the United States this year, 149 congregations will send their pastors on sabbaticals of their choosing.

Smith will use part of the grant money for several extended retreats this summer, including a 10-day centering prayer retreat at the Benedictine Abby in Snowmass, Colo.; a 30-day silent retreat at the Jesuit Center for Spiritual Growth in Wernersville, Pa.; and a class taught by Jesuit priest and internationally known peace activist the Rev. John Dear at the Ghost Ranch in Albuquerque, N.M.

She will also take time to visit family and friends.

Part of the grant money will purchase the materials needed to build a brick labyrinth in front of the church for use by members and the community at large.

The labyrinth is "a gift to all of Winchester," said Smith. "As people walk it, I hope they enter into a place of prayer, meditation and contemplation."

The theme of Smith's grant application was "Deepening Relationships with God Through Spiritual Practices," and her planned retreats and the building of the labyrinth put that concept into action.

She worked on the grant application for a year after discussing the idea with several members of her church.

Parish ministers are in constant demand and are always on call, said Smith.

"Our roles are often similar to firefighters, in that there can be times of quiet, but there are also times of great stress and demand," she said.

Smith is excited about the time she will spend in prayer and contemplation.

"Everyone can work at deepening their relationship with God, and none of us can fully know or appreciate the depth of God's love for us," said Smith. "The more we know ourselves and that we are loved by God, the more clearly will be our understanding of what God is calling us to do. I've learned that what's good for me is also what God wants for me."



*The Rev. Dr. Hilary B. Smith shows samples of the pavers that will be used to build a labyrinth in the circle behind her at St. Paul's on-the-Hill Episcopal Church on Senseny Road. She was recently awarded a \$28,000 grant through the Endowment's National Clergy Renewal Program.*



*This shows an example of a labyrinth similar to the one that will be built for use by the parishioners and the community.*

She plans to return in September energized to continue the ministry at St. Paul's and hopes God will give her a vision of the things that he wants accomplished here.

While she is away, the Rev. Dr. Ellen Richardson will be the primary pastor and worship leader.

A sabbatical for a pastor also can be a time of renewal for the congregation, said Smith.

"Lay leaders begin to see how they are truly the ministers to the church. My time away will empower the congregation to lead, minister and help each other," she said.

The congregation members indeed view the next three months as a sabbatical for themselves, too, said Alisha M. King of Winchester, senior warden.

Although they are somewhat nervous about life without their rector, most members are excited to see what they can accomplish together and "show what we can do," she said.

They will have some chores to attend to while Smith is away. Members of the congregation will lay the bricks for the labyrinth during the summer - a task which should take about four weeks to complete.

Admittedly, no one in the church has ever built a labyrinth, and the physical part of it will be challenging, King said. "But the activity will bring the congregation together and be a visible sign of who we are and what we can do."

The labyrinth is a good symbol for being on a spiritual journey, said Smith.

"A labyrinth is not a maze, but when you're walking the circular path, it twists and turns and weaves in and out," Smith said.

"When you're in the labyrinth, just as in life, if you trust God and follow the path, you won't get lost and you'll eventually reach the center."

### ***Information***

St. Paul's on-the-Hill at 1527 Senseny Road east of Winchester holds worship services at 5 p.m. Saturdays and at 9 a.m. Sundays. Bible studies take place at noon Tuesdays and at 10:15 a.m. Wednesdays. Sunday School is held at 9 a.m. for children ages 3-11 during the school year. For more information, call 540-667-8110 or visit [spoth.org](http://spoth.org) or email [office@spoth.org](mailto:office@spoth.org).