

Rockford Pastor Supports Use of Medical Marijuana

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SPRINGFIELD — During his 30 years as a Presbyterian pastor, the Rev. Bob Hillenbrand said, he encountered a number of folks whose treatment could have been enhanced by medical marijuana.

Hillenbrand, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Rockford, recently joined an effort to allow those with debilitating medical conditions to legally possess the drug in Illinois.

"I think there's a lot of ignorance about this," he said Monday. "I'm certainly not an expert myself, but I have heard quite a number of doctors say — and I happen to agree with them — that treatment like this might very well be in order."

Legislation to legalize medical marijuana is pending before the Illinois Senate. Even if Illinois policymakers approve the measure, the federal government insists marijuana — even for medical treatment — is illegal.

"I think that medical treatments need to be determined by scientific evidence and by the doctor/patient relationship, not by somebody's fear of prejudice outside that relationship," Hillenbrand said.

He said he made a few phone calls to help mobilize other clergy behind the legislation, but he declined to identify them.

"I've had a few pats on the back from folk of different traditions," he said.