Dear Friends,

By now, you may have heard about the exploration of Bethany offering a sabbatical for Pastor Chad. This has been a process of discernment, research, and review since it was raised from the congregation at an annual meeting two years ago.

Some of the work done up to this point include discussions amongst the council and Executive Committee, which resulted in the formation of a sabbatical committee and assemblance of a Sabbatical Policy, which was approved and adopted by the council August 10, 2026. This policy is located under the "Resources" page of our website and can be viewed by clicking here. The sabbatical committee consists of: Pastor Chad, Phil Hougen, Alan Beyer, Cindy Knoop, and Jill Taylor.

Additionally, per the policy, Pastor Chad was required to submit a Sabbatical Plan. This was reviewed by the sabbatical committee, executive committee, and then the council. The plan was approved at the November 9, 2026, council meeting along with funding for a 12-week sabbatical in 2027. It, too, is on the "Resources" page of our website and can be viewed by clicking here.

We are aware there may be questions about what a sabbatical is and how will this affect the day-to-day ministries at Bethany in Pastor Chad's absence. The sabbatical committee will be making opportunities available in early 2027 to learn more. In the meantime, this letter will hope to address some of your questions. Further, if you have specific questions, please see a member of the sabbatical committee or church council.

While not required, the compensation guidelines of the Southeastern Iowa Synod note, "Congregations are encouraged to develop a Sabbatical Policy for rostered ministers." Further guidance from the website of the Southeastern Iowa Synod notes:

A sabbatical offers rostered ministers the opportunity to step away from the daily rhythms and responsibilities of ministry and make space for renewal, rest, spiritual growth, study, travel, creativity, or exploration. A sabbatical is more than simply taking time off. It is an intentional opportunity to listen, reflect, and reconnect with your vocation.

Bethany's sabbatical policy notes, "A sabbatical is intended to strengthen both the rostered leader and the congregation for sustained, faithful ministry."

Below are some potential questions you may be thinking. The answers come either from synod guidance or our sabbatical policy.

When is a rostered leader eligible for a sabbatical? After 6-8 years of continuous service within the same ministry setting.

What will the duration of the sabbatical be? Sabbaticals should be no less than six weeks and no more than three months. The sabbatical committee recommended and the council approved a three-month sabbatical for Pastor Chad.

When will the sabbatical occur? Specific dates are still being determined but most likely will begin either in May or the first of June. This tends to be a slower time for ministry and allow the least amount of disturbance in day-to-day ministry.

Who will provide coverage and leadership during the sabbatical? The committee will utilize a combination of rostered leaders available for supply coverage within the synod and lay leadership to cover Sunday worship and pastoral care. The committee will work in consultation with the Office of the Bishop to help identify rostered leaders who may be available to assist.

What will the cost to Bethany be? Pastor Chad will continue to receive full salary and benefits during the sabbatical as per our policy. We will be required to compensate pastoral coverage for worship and pastoral care per Synod minimum compensation guidelines. The sabbatical committee projected a maximum budget for pastoral coverage at $5,300 and believe this can be substantially reduced utilizing lay leadership where possible.

What if there is an emergency during the sabbatical, such as a death. Will Pastor Chad be available? In short, no, Pastor Chad will not be available. Our policy states, "The rostered leader will be fully released from regular ministry responsibilities." It does warrant a potential return in "rare and pre-arranged circumstances."

Will this benefit the congregation? Yes. Not only is a sabbatical an opportunity for the rostered leader but it is also an opportunity for shared ministry and leadership growth.

What will Pastor Chad be doing? As stated earlier, a sabbatical is more than just taking time off, nor is it vacation. While intentional rest is part of sabbatical so is renewal and growth. Pastor Chad's plan that was approved has a focus on pursuing "opportunities for spiritual formation through structured study, spiritual direction, spiritual practices, worship, retreat, Scripture, and intentional listening for the Spirit."

Are there other expectations I should be aware of? Yes, our policy states, "the rostered leader is expected to remain in their call at least one (1) year following the sabbatical" and "upon return, the rostered leader will share reflections with the congregation, including insights and possible implications for ministry." Additionally, Pastor Chad has included in his plan the intent and exploration of ways to make the congregation apprised of happenings while on sabbatical.

We invite you to review the sabbatical policy and sabbatical plan on our website. Copies will also be made available at church. Watch for updates from the sabbatical committee and opportunities to learn more.

Sincerely,

Bethany Lutheran Sabbatical Committee
Bethany Lutheran Church Council