Sabbatical Plan

Pastor Chad Whaley – Bethany Lutheran Church

PURPOSE

A sabbatical provides an intentional time for rest, renewal, reflection, and growth in ministry. Scripture gives us the rhythms of Sabbath, and Jesus modeled the importance of prayer, solitude, and renewal throughout his ministry.

From the book, *Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning,* I particularly appreciate the description of sabbatical as a "Holy Trek"**—** a time to step away from the ordinary demands of ministry and create space to listen for God and encounter God's presence in new ways.

I view a sabbatical as a gift from God and God's people at Bethany. My primary focus will be spiritual renewal and formation**:** growing in the joy of being a child of God, baptized and set free in Christ; deepening my relationship with God; and learning practices that help me live more fully into the Apostle Paul's invitation to "rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18).

HOPED-FOR-OUTCOMES

Spiritual Renewal

Deepen my relationship with God through prayer, Scripture, worship, spiritual direction, spiritual practices, solitude, and time in creation.

Receiving God's Love

Live more fully into my identity as God's beloved child.

Learning and Practice

Explore and practice spiritual disciplines and discern which practices may become sustainable rhythms for my life and ministry.

Discernment

Discern how the renewal and learning of the sabbatical may shape my ongoing life and ministry.

Congregational Growth and Renewal

The renewal of the rostered leader can contribute to the renewal and vitality of the congregation. Returning with renewed spiritual energy, attentiveness, and capacity for ministry, I hope to bring that renewal into the life of Bethany. At the same time, the sabbatical will provide an opportunity for Bethany to strengthen shared ministry. Members will have opportunities to exercise their gifts, take on leadership responsibilities, and support one another in ministry. Through this experience, the congregation may gain a deeper appreciation for the gifts God has already given its people and a renewed sense of confidence in its calling to participate together in Christ's mission.

GENERAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE SABBATICAL

The sabbatical will follow a general framework rather than a fixed schedule. The three areas on the next page—rest and renewal, receiving and spiritual formation, and discernment and integration—are intended to flow into and overlap with one another throughout the twelve weeks. The specific timing and balance of experiences will remain flexible, allowing space to respond to opportunities, needs, and the movement of the Spirit.

Rest & Renewal
Space to decompress, be with family and friends, spend time in creation, walk, hike, worship, read, and simply be. Rest and renewal will remain an important part of the sabbatical throughout the twelve weeks.

Receiving Again
Opportunities for spiritual formation through structured study, spiritual direction, spiritual practices, worship, retreat, Scripture, and intentional listening for the Spirit. This may include spending time with the Psalms as a resource for prayer and reflection.

Possible experiences may include online spiritual formation courses through Project Starling, a program of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago; retreat opportunities such as those offered by the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky or the Christian Spirituality Retreat through Creighton University; and other opportunities that may emerge. Specific experiences will be determined based on availability, timing, and available resources.

Worship will also be an intentional part of the sabbatical, with opportunities to worship as a participant rather than a leader and experience different expressions of Christian community and worship.

Discern & Integrate
Throughout the sabbatical, and with particular attention toward the latter part of the journey, I will make space to reflect on what I receive during the sabbatical. This is not mine alone; I will discern what God may be giving me that can also become a gift to the congregation. As appropriate, I will consider how what I have learned might be integrated into the life of Bethany through existing ministries, future opportunities for spiritual formation, and resources that could benefit the congregation more broadly.

DATES AND COVERAGE
The proposed sabbatical is anticipated to be twelve weeks, with dates to be determined in consultation with the Sabbatical Committee and Congregation Council. The timing will seek to minimize disruption to the congregation's ministry and provide the best opportunity for the sabbatical's goals to be accomplished.

During the sabbatical, the rostered leader will be fully released from regular ministry responsibilities. Coverage will utilize a combination of retired rostered leaders, lay members of the congregation, and supply clergy as needed. Worship leadership, pastoral care, funerals, and other ministry needs will be addressed through this shared approach. The Sabbatical Committee will work with the Congregation Council to finalize coverage arrangements and communicate them clearly to the congregation prior to the sabbatical.

COMMUNICATION AND SHARING
During the sabbatical, I will keep a personal journal of my experiences, reflections, and ways I encounter God throughout the journey. I also plan to take photographs along the way and use a simple online journal to occasionally share photographs and brief reflections with members of the congregation and others who may wish to follow the journey.

Following the sabbatical, I will provide an opportunity for the congregation to hear more fully about the experience and what I have received through it. This may include a presentation, articles, videos, or a combination of approaches. The purpose of this sharing will be not simply to report on what I did, but to reflect on what I received and how the experience may shape my ongoing life and ministry.