

## SABBATICAL PLAN 2024 – PASTOR TOR K. BERG

First Lutheran Church, Bothell WA

*CARE: Love in Action*

### Background

The foundation of a pastoral sabbatical comes from the scriptures. Leviticus 25, for example, describes God's command to Moses that land be tilled for six years and allowed to rest on the seventh, which became known as a sabbath or sabbatical year. This gave birth to the idea that a pastor will be given a sabbatical every seven years.

Scripture contains a number of other such statements, all of which proclaim the need for rest:

Genesis 2: 2-3      God rested on the seventh day and hallowed it

Exodus 20: 8-11    "...the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord"

Psalms 23            "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul."

Mark 6: 30-31      "The apostles gathered around Jesus...'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.' For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. "

Luke 5: 15-16      "But now more than ever the word about Jesus spread abroad; many crowds would gather to hear him and to be cured of their diseases. But he would withdraw to deserted places and pray."

Beyond the idea of periodic rest, various resources, some recent and some from former times, describe additional attributes and goals of a pastoral sabbatical:

'Rest in order to gather fresh strength' (C. Spurgeon, 1856)

Vision, planning, renewal, soul care, back to work

Devotional plan, family time, physical rest, exercise, diet, counseling, studying, writing

Spiritual growth aided by periodic rest and renewal

Develop modest goals for a sabbatical that don't produce stress

In pursuing these kinds of goals, it becomes apparent that the reasoning surrounding a pastor's sabbatical may deviate from that of a commercial or academic enterprise. It is important for the congregation and its leaders to appreciate this. In fact, Jesus makes this very point (Mark 2:23-28), reminding us that the law does not take precedence over the sabbath.

Much of the weight of church life falls on the shoulders of our pastors. Pastors' responsibilities are 24/7, in that they must respond to emergencies or other matters that happen at completely unpredictable times. Our recent experience with the Covid19 pandemic is a stark reminder that the church and its leaders can be called upon in unexpected ways to provide ministry. This may require pastors to quickly develop radically new

approaches and techniques. First Lutheran Church was most fortunate that this happened in a competent and timely fashion.

But these responsibilities can exert a certain toll. It is well recognized that, over time, the challenges of ministry can lead to burnout and reduced pastoral retention, events that are obviously harmful to pastor and congregation alike. Reports indicate that some 29% of pastors admitted to experiencing burnout in 2021, a figure that has since increased by some 13%. Nearly one-half of pastors under the age of 45 have considered leaving full-time ministry. Personal reasons include stress, isolation, political differences, and adverse effects on family members. More corporate frustrations are not surprising, and include the decline of churches locally and nationally.

For these reasons, the ELCA, NW Washington Synod, and our own congregation recognize the value and indeed the need for pastoral sabbaticals. Synodical guidelines, our local council's mandate (Appendix 1), and Pastor Berg's Letter of Call stipulate that he take a sabbatical every seven years and so our committee has developed this plan to ensure that Pastor's sabbatical provides adequate rest and restoration with the ultimate goal of sustaining vibrant and effective ministry.

Through our experience with planning Pastor's 2017 sabbatical, we also came to realize the value of a congregational sabbatical, to run in parallel with Pastor's sabbatical. With that thought in mind, committee members, with Pastor Berg, developed a theme for both Pastor Berg's and the congregation's sabbatical, namely *CARE: Love in Action*.

'Care' is one of our congregation's core vision statements (see Mission Statement below). "Together we create a welcoming community in which all can find love, support, encouragement, acceptance, forgiveness, guidance, and hope. We value relationships of mutual respect, compassion, and attention to the needs of others." These sabbatical goals are in keeping with our Vision 2025 plan, in that we desire to develop a culture of listening for the call of God through acts of discipleship, discernment, and reformation, while recognizing the importance of hospitality, especially to marginalized, intergenerational, and senior groups. For these reasons, we view care for the self and other as being valued components of the pastoral and congregational sabbatical and see sabbath keeping as an important vehicle for developing and sustaining a life of caring.

### **Structure and Themes of Pastor Berg's Sabbatical**

Rest, Reflection, Growth, and Re-creation

Continued attention to self care

Empowering disciples to sustain ministry

Sabbatical plan (see Appendix 2)

### ***Sabbatical Expenses* (covered by FLC sabbatical savings fund)**

Pulpit Supply Honorariums           \$4,200.00

Pulpit Supply Mileage                 \$ 300.00

Emergency Pastoral Care Coverage   \$1,000.00

Education Materials                   \$2,000.00

TOTAL Congregation Expenses:       \$7,500.00

Note: This budget has been approved by the FLC Finance Committee (March 25, 2024).

### *Pastors*

Rev. Pam Russell – first six weeks of Pastor’s sabbatical

Rev. Mary Lindberg – second six weeks of Pastor’s sabbatical

Rev. Katy Sachse / Rev. Gina Herman (Emergency pastoral care, Holy Spirit Lutheran Church, Kirkland WA)

### **Structure of Congregation’s Sabbatical**

To accompany Pastor Berg’s sabbatical, we will establish a congregational sabbatical. We will ask our visiting pastors to incorporate our sabbatical theme of caring with sabbath keeping as appropriate in their sermons and other teachings. The following are several suggestions of how that might happen.

We see a congregational sabbatical, in essence an extended Sabbath, as a time for rest, a time to grow spiritually, and a vehicle for caring for ourselves and each other. We see ‘rest’ as having numerous components, among them rest from work, rest from challenges in our lives, and rest from an overwhelmingly materialistic and power-hungry world. All of this provides care for the self. Sabbath also serves as a vehicle for caring for the other, and we envision conversation surrounding the importance of being present for the other and developing our listening and visitation skills. The sabbatical committee will sponsor three Sunday morning sessions (modeled after Coffee with Council and/or adult education classes) to discuss the major themes of caring and sabbath keeping. We will ask our congregational members, sabbatical committee members, and council members to converse with visitors, new members, and those who we know less well during fellowship times at church. Particularly, we will ask our formal greeters to continue their duties after worship services as well as before. We will encourage members of the congregation to deepen their thoughts and actions surrounding additional ways of caring for the self and other (see Twelve Ways to Care – Appendix 3). The sabbatical committee will organize a welcome back reception for Pastor Berg at the end of his sabbatical.

### *Coordinate with visiting pastors*

We will share our ideas with our visiting pastors, and see several formats that could facilitate our congregational sabbatical. These include sermons; adult education sessions, perhaps modeled after our recent Eucharist series with outside videos and discussion; and/or Journey class(es).

### *Outcomes*

Pastor Berg will return from his sabbatical rested and re-energized, with an enhanced understanding of and dedication to effective and sustainable time management. Pastor will employ ideals of caring for ourselves and each other and of sabbath keeping in sermons and other teachings following his return.

The congregation will learn more about the attributes of ‘care’ and ‘sabbath keeping’ through sermons, other efforts of visiting pastors, and use of the bulletin inserts. The committee will document participation in educational sessions and conduct formal surveys to assess the success of these discussions by examining specific areas: increased understanding of and practice of self care; care for the other by means of increased listening and visitation skills; and, the specific benefits and challenges of sabbath keeping. The committee will

share survey results with the council and congregation. A long-range hope is that this experience might influence future mission efforts.

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This report has been drawn up by the 2024 sabbatical planning committee composed of Gary Curtis (council liaison), Darci Desilet, Eric Peoples, Gordy Phelps (personnel committee liaison), Joe Siebert (chair), Karen Thomas, and Pastor Berg.

## **MISSION STATEMENT OF FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH**

“At First Lutheran Church, God calls us to CARE for one another in community; GROW in faith and discipleship; SERVE the needs of a broken world; and, in all we do, PROCLAIM the love and saving grace of Jesus Christ.

### *Guiding Principles*

**CARE:** Together we create a welcoming community in which all can find love, support, encouragement, acceptance, forgiveness, guidance, and hope. We value relationships of mutual respect, compassion, and attention to the needs of others.

**GROW:** We nurture personal relationships with God that strengthen us to trust and follow God with devotion. We do this through worship, study, and other opportunities that enrich us spiritually and equip us for God’s work.

**SERVE:** We show God’s love through action. God calls us to use our unique gifts to provide for those in need, speak out for justice, and promote responsible stewardship of God’s creation.

**PROCLAIM:** We proclaim Jesus Christ by sharing with everyone God’s story of eternal love for all humanity. God’s love is given to us as a gift embodied in the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior. We accept God’s call to declare this good news to all people.”

## **COMMITTEE RESOURCES**

### *Texts:*

*Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning.* Richard Bullock. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000.

*Embracing Rhythms of Work and Rest: From Sabbath to Sabbatical and Back Again.* Ruth Haley Barton. IVP Formation, 2022.

*Sabbath and Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now.* Walter Brueggemann. Westminster John Knox Press, 2014.

### *On-line resources:*

[How to Set Objectives and Make an Effective Sabbatical Plan - Missionary Life](#)

[Ministry Sabbaticals: A Pastor's Guide - Daily Pastor](#)

[A Sabbatical Guide For Pastors - Soul Shepherding](#)

[Excerpt: 'Planning Sabbaticals: A Guide for Congregations and Their Pastors' | Faith and Leadership](#)

[Pastors Share Top Reasons They've Considered Quitting Ministry in the Past Year - Barna Group](#)

[Opinion | Why Pastors Are Burning Out - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#)

## APPENDIX 1

### Continuing Resolution - *First Lutheran Church - Bothell, Washington*

**Title:** 2024 Sabbatical Planning Team

**Council/Committee:** Council

**Adoption Date:** October 17, 2023

**Start Date:** October 2023

**End Date/Review Date:** December 2024

**References:** Related to C12.04 specifically C12.04.01 and FLC Personnel Policies 11.2.

#### **RESOLUTION:**

Pastor Berg has let it be known that he is interested in taking his sabbatical leave in 2024, his 14<sup>th</sup> year called to this congregation.

A Planning team will be made up seven (7) congregation members: Pastor Berg, two members of the previous planning team, two at-large congregation members, a representative from council and a representative from the Personnel Committee. They will develop a plan for the sabbatical which will include:

- Length of Sabbatical
- Pastoral Coverage
- Financial Plan
- Expected outcomes of the sabbatical for Pastor Berg and the Congregation. This will, in part, be done by reviewing the 2023 congregational survey and soliciting input from the various committees and ministry areas of the congregation.

This plan will be approved by the Personnel Committee and the Congregation Council and presented to the congregation (in person and online).

At the conclusion of the Sabbatical, Pastor Berg and the Sabbatical Planning Team will develop a report describing the outcomes of the pastor and the congregation.

#### **11.2 FLC's Sabbatical Policy**

This type of leave will be considered after each seven years of employment. This Congregation recognizes that Rostered Staff (ministers of Word and Sacrament and ministers of Word and Service) and full time Program Staff have a need to increase and extend their knowledge and competency in their fields of specialization. This may be accomplished through a Sabbatical Leave, during which time full salary and benefits will be continued. The granting of a Sabbatical Leave, not to exceed three months, needs consideration by the Pastor(s), Congregation Council and the Personnel Committee. Following the completion of the sabbatical, the employee will agree to remain employed at the Congregation for a period of not less than one year at the discretion of the Congregation Council.

Sabbatical Leaves are restricted to those employees for whom it can be demonstrated that the leave will increase their value to this Congregation. Requests for Sabbatical Leaves, including the program of study or spiritual renewal are to be submitted, in writing, to the Personnel Committee. Upon review, the proposal will be reviewed and approved by the Congregation Council. The Personnel Committee, with the approval of the Congregation Council, will negotiate the terms of the sabbatical leave.

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**APPENDIX 2: Pastor Berg's 2024 Sabbatical Planning (abridged)**

June 30 – Blessing and Sendoff Sunday

October 1 – First day in office

October 6 – Welcome back Sunday

## APPENDIX 3: Sample Monthly Bulletin Insert

### **Twelve Ways to Care: Sabbatical Thoughts for First Lutheran Church Members**

#### *Care for Self*

Spend time in contemplative prayer or spiritual reading

Take a nature walk

#### *Care for Others*

Call

Visit

Write a letter

Spend time in the narthex speaking with someone you don't know well

#### *Care for the Community*

Pick up trash

Contribute to the 'Change for Change' jar

Contribute to a food drive and/or FLC's Caring Corner

#### *Care for the World*

Eat low on the food chain

Buy local

Donate to Lutheran World Relief, ELCA Disaster Response, Global Refuge, etc.