

Pastor's Reflections

by Jeffrey E. Frantz

Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you.
(Deuteronomy 5:12)

*The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath;
So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath* (Mark 2:27-28).

What is a sabbatical? As I prepare for my four-month sabbatical leave one year from now (May 17 – September 16th), I want to begin to prepare the congregation for this *shared* experience.

The term *sabbatical* comes from the biblical term *Sabbath* which refers to the seventh day in the creation story where God rested from all the work God had done. The fourth Commandment, cited above, is a reminder of God's purposes for the *Sabbath*. As with God on the seventh day, the *Sabbath* is a time for rest and recovery. Historically, it was a weekly observance to nourish the body, mind, and soul.

In their book, *Clergy Renewal, The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning* (which the church has a copy of), A. Richard Bullock and Richard J. Bruesehoff note:

Sabbath keeping and sabbatical leave are part of a rhythm of life intended to refresh and renew all of creation so that all of creation will continue to reflect the face and will of God. Hence Sabbath keeping becomes a way of living.

Having said this, it is an increasingly common practice for churches to build *Sabbatical Leave* into the covenant/contract they have with their pastors. Indeed, such a *leave* was included in the terms of *The Call* I accepted to become pastor of Miami Lakes Congregational Church back in May of 2000, for which I am deeply grateful.

The terms of the call state: *A sabbatical leave for a period of three (3) months is agreed after five or more years of continuous service to the church. Payment of salary and benefits continue during this period.*

In recent years, the Church Council has, responsibly, been encouraging me to take a sabbatical leave, as provided in the terms of my call. So, finally, it is going to happen. By the time of my planned *leave*, I will have completed ten years as your pastor (can't believe it's been that long ... where did all the time go?). With that in mind, along with the recommendation that, for many pastors, four months is preferable to three, I am opting for the four months of leave.

What does this mean? It means that I will be away from the church for a four month period—again, May 17- September 16, 2010. As you can see, most of that time will be over the summer months when church attendance and activity is lowest.

Who will be filling in for me, providing the services I normally provide?

Our church will hire an Interim Pastor for the four months period. The pastor will prepare the weekly bulletin, preach at Sunday worship, do pastoral calling (i.e., hospitals etc.), attend the monthly Council meetings, and have afternoon office hours two days per week.

Other work will be delegated and *picked up* by the creative and committed members and friends of our church (i.e., you; *hey, you can do it!*).

One of the things congregations tend to learn during the sabbatical leave of their pastors is that they are very capable and resourceful. In many ways, it is a time of blossoming for different church members and friends.

Meanwhile, for the pastor (and Yvette, too), it is a time for rest and renewal, a time for relaxed study, writing and travel, a time for reflection and envisioning with regard to the future of the church. Typically, pastors return to their churches refreshed and renewed, having learned important things about themselves and the future to which God calls them in their pastoral setting.

Is the pastor really coming back?

Just to be real clear on this: YES! I love this church, its people and have a strong commitment to continue to lead us into the second decade of the 21st century. I still have many hopes and visions for our church family.

Where is the pastor going?

My plan, which I've been working on for months, along with our Clergy Renewal Support Team (CRST), chaired by Dr. Arlene Brett, is the following:

1. Nine days to visit my three siblings.
2. One week in a monastery in California, decompressing, under the supervision of a Spiritual Director.
3. Fly (with Yvette) to Albi, France for fifteen weeks, one week of which will be spent visiting parts of Turkey and Greece.
4. Four days for re-entry upon my return.

There are obviously many details we'll need to address. In the year ahead, the CRST and I will be working to help prepare our congregation for this *sabbatical leave* experience. Along the way, as questions/ concerns arise, please do not hesitate to approach me or the following CRST members: Anne Green, Ruby Holihan, Nancy Stander, Marion Olsen, Dr. Gail Ballweg, Carolyn Furlong, Maria Gross and Eddie Miranda.

Peace, Jeffrey

