

- 1) Provide a clearly articulated rationale for engaging in the clergy renewal program. In doing so, please give careful thought to the connection between the purpose, the proposed activities, and your rationale. Tell us why the activities that the pastor and congregation are proposing are the right ones to promote renewal for ministry.**

Then God said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." - Exodus 3:5

Sabbatical Purpose: For both the pastor and the congregation to see sacred space in every setting.

After years in the same place, living the same daily routine, it is easy to assume that life is mundane. If the sacred is that which is "set apart," how do we cultivate a sense of the sacred in a place where we have put down roots? The character of this sabbatical is focused on helping me cultivate a deeper sense of the sacred across three excursions, each offering different physical, social, and occupational contexts. Having learned to see how God is infused in these new contexts, I hope to return refreshed and renewed to see the Holy in my daily context.

The first excursion centers around summiting Mount Shasta, providing an opportunity to explore the sacred in the physical context of wilderness, the social context of solitude, and the occupational context of exercise. The second excursion centers around traveling to Istanbul with my wife Annalisa, and my daughter Sophia, providing an opportunity to explore the sacred in the physical context of a metropolis, the social context of family, and the occupational context of exploration. The third excursion also includes my wife and daughter and centers around a two week seminar reading ancient Greek in a Greek village. This final excursion provides the opportunity to explore the sacred in the physical context of a village, the social context of a community, and the occupational context of learning. Time for rest and reflection will be interspersed throughout this 12-week agenda. Though these contexts differ, the purpose will be the same: to provide an opportunity to daily reflect on where I see the sacred and how sacred space is present in each of these places in order to cultivate a sense of the sacred in my daily life when I return home.

While I am away, the congregation will be using this time to strengthen lay ministry and see themselves as sacred even in the absence of their pastor. When I return to the congregation, the intention is that the process of the congregation and I debriefing each other on our time away will result mutual enrichment. The congregation will be inspired by what I saw and learned on my travels, both abroad and in our own backyard, and I

will be inspired by the ways in which the congregation learned to see themselves as the body of Christ.

- 2) Provide a detailed narrative description of the pastor's activities and the timeline for the renewal program. Indicate whether the leave time will be one uninterrupted block, or several shorter leaves taken over 24 months. Include a brief description and a rationale for each of these activities. This section is where you will give the fullest description of your plans and describe how the pieces fit together to promote renewal of ministry for the pastor. This section of the Proposal Narrative provides a detailed explanation of the information included on the Outline of Renewal Program form. Ensure that all activities described here in the Proposal Narrative are also reflected on the Outline of Renewal form.**

Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized Jesus; and he vanished from their sight. – Luke 24: 31

The sabbatical leave proposed for Pr. Ben will be one uninterrupted block, May 27th - August 18th, 2024, and include three major pieces: Part 1) hiking Mount Shasta in California; Part 2) exploring Istanbul and the surrounding area in Turkey; and Part 3) participating in an Ancient Greek language and literature seminar in the village of Selianitika, Greece. In each of these places, he will be reflecting on where he sees God and how space becomes sacred.

Part 1: Sacred wilderness, isolation, and exercise. Pastor Ben will embark on a three day guided climb to summit Mount Shasta June 28th-30th, 2024. Mt. Shasta is a 14,179 foot tall volcano that rises from the northern California valley floor. Its size and unique location has made it a sacred site to many indigenous tribes, including the Shasta, Modoc, Karuk, Klamath, and Wintu. From Mount Sinai to the Transfiguration, the Bible speaks of mountains as places where mortals experience the divine. Pastor Ben's first space in which to understand the presence of the sacred will be the literal "mountain top experience."

Pastor Ben is an avid hiker who has traversed much of the nearby wilderness, but he has never had the time to prepare for and attempt summiting the region's highest and most iconic peak. Because Mount Shasta is so easily visible and accessible from our local area, finding the sacred on this mountain serves as a reminder that we do not have to travel far to find the sacred. He will spend four weeks prior to submitting Mt. Shasta training through smaller day hikes in the region. Though he will be living at

home, this period of training is an opportunity for Pastor Ben to have time alone in prayer and meditation through physical exertion.

While preparing to summit Mt. Shasta, Pastor Ben and his wife will read together *Backpacking with the Saints: Wilderness Hiking as Spiritual Practice* by Belden C. Lane in order to develop a shared language for understanding the sacred in the wilderness. Each night the pastor and his family list “God sightings” which they will write down in a journal. During the period of training, the pastor and his family will also have the opportunity to do day trips to visit sacred spaces of other communities built around Mt. Shasta, most notably, Shasta Abbey Buddhist (Soto Zen) Monastery and the Healing Rooms at Bethel Church in Redding, CA.

Part 2: Sacred metropolis, family, and exploration. Pastor Ben, his wife Annalisa, and their daughter Sophia will travel to Turkey July 12-21st. The center of their experience will be Istanbul, which was for over a thousand years the largest and most important city (Constantinople) of the Christian world. It is a city where visual and performing arts were and are integrated with architecture and urban design across layers of traditions and centuries.

Pastor Ben is a lover of ancient Greek history but has never had the opportunity to travel to the historical centers of Hellenism. Visiting Istanbul will not only allow him to see and share with his family a place that has inspired his imagination for decades, it will be an opportunity to study how Christianity created sacred spaces in medieval Europe’s largest Christian metropolis. This is time for the family to bond as they explore an entirely new culture and part of the world together. From the massive (former Orthodox cathedral) of Hagia Sophia to the small enclaves of the modern Christian minority and the daily routine of the Muslim majority, the pastor and his family will be looking for how people hold on to the holy in the midst of urban chaos.

While visiting Istanbul, Pastor Ben and his wife will read together the writings of St. John Chrysostom, an archbishop of Constantinople in the late 4th and early 5th centuries. They will focus on John Chrysostom's sermons pertaining to life in the city where they will be staying and living out faith as a family. Each night the pastor and his family list “God sightings” which they will write down in a journal. During their time in Turkey, the pastor and his family will also have the opportunity to do two and three day trips to visit sacred urban spaces in other parts of Turkey, most notably, the underground Christian cities of Kaymakli and Derinkuyu in Cappadocia and the ruins of the sacred Roman city of Ephesus.

Part 3: Sacred village, community, and learning. Pastor Ben, accompanied by his family, will participate in the Paideia Institute's two-week intensive ancient Greek language and literature experience, "Living Greek in Greece," July 29th - August 11th. Pastor Ben will participate in two seminar-style meetings every day, reading and discussing ancient Greek literature and philosophy while Annalisa and Sophia spend their days getting to know the locals in the surrounding coastal village of Selianitika and seeing how the local navigate the sacred and mundane in their daily lives.

Pastor Ben was a Classics major in college and makes frequent use of his knowledge of ancient Greek language and history through word studies and providing cultural context in his preaching and teaching. Nearly two decades since his college years, he could use a refresher in the finer points of ancient Greek. Just as importantly, translating and discussing ancient texts with colleagues is a joy for the pastor, one which he does not often have the opportunity to enjoy.

The format of the Paideia Institute's experience allows for a social middle ground between pastor hiking alone and being with his family while traveling in Turkey. During the day, Pastor will be collaborating with a small group on one of his passions. During the midday break and in the evenings, he will be with his family as they together find a way to create a sense of sacred community with both the other participants in the seminary, but also the inhabitants of the local village. These two weeks will most closely resemble the rhythm of Pastor Ben's work when he returns to congregational ministry, and is an opportunity for the family to explore how to put into practice what they have learned during the sabbatical.

While in the village of Selianitika, Pastor Ben and his wife will read together *The Practice Of The Presence of God* by Brother Lawrence, a 17th century French monk who discussed how to make sacred the daily activities of living in community. Each night the pastor and his family list "God sightings" which they will write down in a journal. While in Greece, the pastor and his family will also have the opportunity to do day trips to visit sacred communal spaces in other parts of Greece, most notably, the cliff-top monasteries of Meteora and the Oracle of Delphi.

The sabbatical will also include a week of rest at the start and end of the sabbatical, as well as two weeks of rest after climbing Mt. Shasta and a week of rest at a Greek resort between Istanbul and the Paideia Institute.

When he returns, Pastor Ben will hold three weeks of Sunday presentations to share how sacred space created in each part of his journey. At these presentations the congregation will also share how we saw the sacred within our community during the

corresponding weeks. Though we can only imagine how, we trust that Pastor Ben's experiences will also lead him to rearrange and decorate the sanctuary in new ways to help us recognize the sacred in our worship space, and that he will invite us into new spiritual practices to help us recognize the sacred in our daily lives.

Through solitary exertion in the wilderness, family exploration in a legendary city, and communal learning in a village, we hope Pastor Ben will return to Faith Lutheran with eyes opened to the holy in Chico, ready to celebrate the sacred with and through our congregation.

3) Provide a statement written by the pastor about why this is the right time in the pastor's ministry to engage this program and what the pastor hopes the benefits will be.

Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. – Luke 10:7

In July of 2023, I will have lived longer in Chico, CA (seven years) than any other place. By sixth grade, I had attended eleven different schools in three different countries. Though his moving slowed as I got older, I continued to move approximately every four years for both professional opportunities and a desire to discover new places.

I have now married a Chicoan local with family in the area. I bought a house. I desire to put down roots. But as I approach seven years in Chico, I face a challenge entirely new to me: discovering what is special, exciting, and sacred about staying put in the same place. I know that God is present and active around me here, but I get so caught up in the daily grind of my home and office, that I can fail to see the Spirit in those places continually calling and transforming me in new and exciting ways. This proposed renewal program is designed to help me learn the skills of seeing the sacred in new places so that I can see the sacred in a familiar place.

At the same time, Faith Lutheran Church has been actively striving to shape a culture of being a member-driven church rather than a staff driven church. In many ways the pandemic shifted daily ministry onto the staff, but in the past year we have made major strides back towards a fully shared ministry between the congregation and staff. A dedicated team within the congregation has been working to identify the spiritual gifts of each member, match those members with ministry opportunities, and pair them with mentors. The congregation held a major facilitator training for small groups and launched several new groups. Worship has highlighted the spiritual gifts and ministry of people in the pews. I have begun teaching a six-week course designed to prepare lay

people to testify and preach. In my teaching and preaching, I have been emphasizing that we collectively are the priesthood of all believers and the body of Christ.

Taking a sabbatical gives the congregation an opportunity to truly live out its call to shared ministry. It gives the congregation an opportunity to be inspired both by ancient and global history of Christianity that I will experience and share with them, but also to be inspired by the ways in which the Holy Spirit is powerfully at work through them in our local community. Sabbatical gives the congregation an opportunity to send away a tired and routinized pastor, and in three months received me back renewed and seeing the community with new eyes, with ways for them to do the same.

The lay leadership of the congregation is vibrant and healthy, making this an excellent time for me to take a sabbatical. But even more so, my desire to travel away in order to learn to see the sacred when I return matches perfectly with the congregation's goal of learning to see themselves as engaging the sacred and carrying out ministry that speaks of God's continual presence even when the pastor is away.

- 4) Provide a similar statement written by a representative of the congregation that describes the intended benefits both for the congregation and the pastor. This statement should summarize the congregation's views and should be incorporated into the body of the proposal. Do not include letters from individual members of the congregation.**

Pastor Ben is energetic, a great preacher, a team builder, and imaginative. He is working hard to help Faith Lutheran Church re-engage in an active and outward-directed ministry to the North State. But like all of us, he and his family would welcome an opportunity to disengage for a few weeks, take a breath from the day to day responsibilities of work, and explore ways to renew and revitalize their spirits. The long hours, demands, and expectations of a senior pastor with a growing staff, growing attendance, the pressure to always be present in crises, as well as the launching of new ministries means that such rest and renewal are essential. The excitement Pastor Ben has expressed for this opportunity to visit ancient and sacred lands is visible and contagious. The shared support of our congregation for Pastor Ben and his ministry will inspire both parties by listening, discussing, and learning from his travel and study.

The sabbatical opportunity with its accompanying funding is a real gift to us all. It provides the motivation and the supporting resources for a truly first-class sabbatical experience. A Sabbatical Committee and the Church Council have worked closely with Pr. Ben to hammer out a reasonable, relevant, focused project and one that is translatable to the developing ministry at Faith Lutheran Church Seeking to "make the

sacred come alive out of the ordinary” is a commitment that rings true for many of us. Its presence in our lives is what often animates our Bible studies, book groups, social ministry, Christmas concerts, mission trips, and projects where we partner with other churches and secular groups to serve our community. If we imagine Pastor Ben and his family as our agents in exploring how to animate this commitment, pursue ideas in search of ways of bringing the sacred home, and then working to communicate and actualize those ideas in concrete ministry you get a good sense of how we are thinking about this experience.

One can see clearly from his narrative how the activities that he hopes to pursue-- include reading, journaling, discussion, learning, and prayerful reflections can be brought home and given a second life in our parish. The sharing of his travels and study with stories, photos and lessons will help our congregation grow together. Many of us will never be able to travel to these fascinating places or have the experiences he will share with us. The transfer of knowledge and learning will educate and inspire our congregation as we grow together in Christ. We as a congregation believe all will benefit from this time with a renewed enthusiasm, renewed perspective and increased knowledge about the ways that appreciating sacred space can strengthen our congregation, our community, and the world.

Pastor Ben’s Spiritual Growth and renewal is always a positive and will help him stay enthused and passionate about Christ and his teachings.

5) Describe the congregation’s plans for covering the necessary pastoral functions during the pastor’s absence, for celebration of the pastor’s leave-taking and return, and/ or for programs or activities that will serve to renew the congregation

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. – 1 Cor. 12:27

Faith Lutheran will use the pastor’s leave-taking for the renewal of active and intentional lay-led ministry.

The congregation will enter into a contractual agreement with a Rostered Minister for the time of Pastor Ben’s sabbatical. The congregation will use \$15,000 to offset the cost of a sabbatical pastor. The sabbatical pastor would oversee and encourage lay leadership in three key areas for which Pastor Ben is currently responsible: preaching, Bible study, and visitation.

Thus, the primary function of the sabbatical pastor is not to carry out Pastor Ben's ministry roles, but to coach, support, and mentor the congregation as they carry the church's ministry forward.

Pastor Ben is presently teaching a course preparing members of the congregation to preach. During his sabbatical the congregation will alternate each week preaching by the sabbatical pastor and preaching by a lay person who has gone through that course and who is coached by the sabbatical pastor. The sabbatical pastor will preside at the eucharist for each Sunday worship.

Continuing the small group training that Faith Lutheran has been doing, lay facilitators will take on the Bible study that Pastor Ben leads and be encouraged to start other short-term summer Bible study groups. The sabbatical pastor will act as a consultant and coach to these Bible study leaders.

Eucharistic ministers, which had been mothballed during the pandemic, are being retrained to visit and share communion with shut-ins and the hospitalized. Faith Lutheran also has a strong Stephen Ministry, which has eight active Stephen Ministers trained to provide one-on-one Christian care to people who are hurting. Both the eucharistic ministers and the Stephen Ministers would be supervised by Faith Lutheran's Stephen Ministry leadership team. The sabbatical pastor would be called-in to visitations involving life-threatening crises and death.

All these activities, publicly sharing our faith, studying the word together, visiting the sick and lonely, are lay ministries with which Faith has a long tradition, and which could benefit from re-invigoration.

Additionally, just as Pastor Ben and his family will be keeping a "God-sightings" journal, so too will members of congregation be invited each week to write down "God-sightings" on slips of paper and place them in the offering plate. A curated collection of these God sightings will be read during worship as well as at the three classes Pastor Ben leads upon his return.

Though Pastor Ben will be missed, his leave gives the congregation an opportunity to fully live out their goal of being a member-led community and to exercise the skills and callings that are being nurtured in the months before the sabbatical commences.

6) Tell us how the congregation will, as much as possible, honor the pastor's need for minimal contact with the congregation during the leave. Have

responsible parties been identified? Are plans for emergencies in place beyond contacting the pastor?

Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in their yield; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of complete rest for the land, a sabbath for the Lord: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. – Leviticus 25:3-4

In order to allow Pastor Ben to rest and be renewed without worry about the needs of the congregation, responsible parties in the areas of pastoral care, daily operations, and organizational oversight have been identified.

In terms of pastoral care, lay eucharistic ministers and small group leads will be the first line of response. Understanding that emergencies requiring a more extensive response will arise, the sabbatical pastor will be available.

In terms of daily operations, Faith Lutheran is blessed with four additional staff members who know their jobs and do them well. We have a Director of Worship and Music, who prepares the liturgy and trains the worship leaders each Sunday. We have a Director of Family, who oversees children, youth, and young adult ministries, as well as small group ministries for all ages. We have an Office Manager who oversees all congregational communication, building maintenance. And we have a parttime bookkeeper who processes our financial needs.

The sabbatical pastor would provide liturgical oversight for the staff, and the council would provide administrative oversight. In addition to regular email communication between the staff and the officers of the congregational council, a representative from the council will meet with the staff every two weeks to ensure everything is running smoothly.

Organizational oversight has always been the responsibility of the congregational council. Over the past 25 years, Faith Lutheran has had eight different pastors. Throughout all those transitions, stable council leadership has ensured stable attendance and finances. During the sabbatical, major decisions pertaining to the life of the congregation will be decided by the eleven members of the council who have been elected by the congregation for this very purpose.

- 7) Give a description of the process by which the congregation determined whether to submit a proposal. Favorable consideration will be given only to proposals that provide evidence of broad congregational support for the**

program and the whole congregation being aware of the application. The best way to indicate this is by giving a detailed description of the steps by which the congregation was made aware and was able to express support. Congregational approval must be assured before an application is submitted, so that if a grant is awarded CTS can be assured that it will be accepted by the congregation.

In May of 2022, the congregation council presented the idea of a sabbatical to the congregation at the annual meeting and received a positive response. In September of 2022, a sabbatical team was formed by the council. The sabbatical team worked with Pastor Ben first to imagine and construct the outline of the proposal and then fill out the details of logistics, financial planning, and discussion with the congregation. Throughout this process the sabbatical team had conversations with key ministry leaders in the congregation to ensure their support.

A draft of the proposal was presented to the council by the sabbatical team in January of 2023. After council approval, the proposal was published in the congregational newsletter. Two meetings in February of 2023 were held to get feedback on the proposal. A final congregation-wide meeting was held in March of 2023 in which the full proposal was presented to the congregation.

8) Is there anything else that you would like the readers to know about the congregation and why this program will be beneficial for ministry? You may be creative in your response. If you would like to provide a video link, for instance, include the typewritten URL link in your response to this prompt. Video clip maximum watch time: 10 minutes. If the video is longer than ten minutes, indicate the timestamp where you would like us to begin watching the ten-minute section

Video link to be added, with interviews, material detailing activities over the past two years, etc. Structure, commentary, etc. to be worked out on Pr. Ben's return
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