

Revised Sabbatical Proposal for Pastor Daniel Bodin

“My Home A Lighthouse”

Matthew 5:14-16

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

July 25, 2023

Part A – Purpose Statement

The purpose of a Pastoral Sabbatical, according to South Shore Trinity’s Sabbatical/Study Leave program (Policy Number SS-840501-A, attached as Appendix I at the end of this document) is to “spend time away from the congregation as a means to rejuvenate from the unique demands of the Pastoral Ministry.”

It is meant to provide a time of special renewal for the pastor that will bring personal nourishment to his soul, a deeper relationship with the Lord, family renewal, and offer an opportunity to continue further studies in his professional field. Also, a sabbatical helps prevent ministry burnout and may give the pastor a fresh perspective for his ministry. By taking time to step away from the day-to-day responsibilities, Pastor Dan will return with renewed energy and a replenished spiritual reservoir.

The renewal experience can also be a great blessing to the disciples of Jesus at South Shore Trinity, to experience renewed energy for the ministry of this church.

Part B – Biblical Underpinnings

“Sabbatical” comes from the image of Sabbath, the cycle of rest found in the Scriptures. There is a weekly rest (Sabbath), a cyclical rest (through each of the feasts of the year), a year-long rest (for the land every seven years), and a year of jubilee, where everything was restored in Israel - property, debts canceled, slaves freed, and a year-long celebration (every 50 years).

Rest and renewal are deeply entrenched Biblical principles. Jesus himself would often steal away to be with the Father, to refresh and restore His soul. In the same way, we want to provide rhythms of rest and restoration to our spiritual leaders.

Part C – Intended Benefit to Pastor Dan and the Congregation of South Shore Trinity

The driving force behind the three-month “renewal experience” is a desire to do what is best for the health of the congregation and her associate pastor, as we look forward to all that God has in store for the future of our ministry together. This “renewal experience” includes a pastoral sabbatical, but can

also address congregational rejuvenation. This will be intentionally pursued in three specific ways: 1) Focusing on ways Pastor Dan, personally, can experience renewal and self-improvement. 2) Focusing on ways to upbuild, deepen, and reconnect with important relationships within my family. 3) Offering opportunities for growth for members of the congregation; equipping, leading, and empowering individuals for engaging in Inter-generational Ministry.

Author Robert C. Saler, in his book “Planning Sabbaticals” writes, “Picture your congregation three months from now. The pastor walks into their office feeling ready to go: energized, spiritually rooted, and creatively inspired. The congregation, similarly, feels as if it has gotten a new injection of energy and insight. The question is: What would have been happening in the three months prior to get pastor and congregation to that state?” (Saler, p. 39) This sabbatical proposal hopes to answer that question.

C.1 – Renewal Experience for Pastor Dan Bodin - Self Improvement

The unique demands of ministry often don’t allow for quiet, un-interrupted, focused, and intentional time set aside to create and live in new patterns of rest and refocus. Over the years, and especially during the COVID years, I have found myself living in unhelpful patterns and habits. This is most apparent in my devotional and prayer life. There have been attempts of habit-changing, but long-term patterns have not emerged as strongly as I’d hope.

This sabbatical will allow the space for intentional habit-breaking and habit-forming. So, in hopes of going deeper, I plan to start writing my own devotions.¹

My goal, then, is not necessarily writing a book, or launching a new website or blog, but is to begin the process of learning what it takes to write impactful and fulfilling devotions. The development of this specific skill aligns nicely with the joys I get from writing, the spiritual uplifting of regularly being in God’s Word, and could someday morph into a product or project that could be read and appreciated by others, especially members of our congregation.

The theme of my sabbatical and of these devotions would be centered on the idea of “My Home A Lighthouse.” Lighthouses have been very special to me over the years, and in my relationship with my wife. We got engaged on a lighthouse boat tour in Bayfield, WI. Our honeymoon included touring many of the lighthouses along the northwestern coast of the states, down into the Redwood National Forest of Northern California. Using the image of a lighthouse, I want to explore how my home (and my family) can function as an outpost of the Gospel, shining the guiding light of God’s truth to my neighbors and

¹ In my research, and personally learning, about what a successful Pastoral sabbatical would look like, I learned that they are unique, and not like an academic sabbatical. Specifically, in the sense that the renewal experience does not automatically mean the creation of a product or project, like a book that would be published, like an academic sabbatical would. However, if the publishing of a book, or the creation of a blog, is something that would be rejuvenating for the pastor doing it, then it certainly can be included. But, by no means, does that mean it would be completed at the end of the sabbatical period.

community. This would be explored more fully, by looking at all the different places in Scripture that discuss “Light” as inspiration for each devotion.

To improve at that skill, my plan is two-fold: Education and practice. In preparation for my sabbatical, I plan to take an online course titled “Writing Devotions with Sharon Hinck: A practical, hands on guide to writing devotions”. She was recommended to me by the Chair of the Department of English, History, Language, and Political Science at Concordia St. Paul.

During the sabbatical period, my plan would be to spend time each day, to not only regularly develop this skill, but more importantly, the pattern of carving out intentional devotional time in my day-to-day routine. It is my intention that this new pattern would then continue upon my return to full-time ministry.

C.2 – Relational Rejuvenation & Great Lakes Family Trip

Quoting again from Robert Saler, he writes, “...the families of pastors are often the ones who bear the brunt of the irregularity of pastoral schedules. Provided that funds and timing work out, many pastors choose to involve family members for at least part of their sabbaticals” (Saler, p. 45).

My sabbatical plan will rebuild relationships and reconnect on a deeper level with the ones closest to me. This will include my family taking trips together, and visiting with extended family. As I have learned, a key component of a good sabbatical plan is an intentional and focused time of rest and renewal for your pastor. And not only is this renewal experience an opportunity for your pastor, but also his family.

Stemming again from the devotional theme of “My Home A Lighthouse,” we plan to take a family trip around the Great Lakes, to visit various lighthouses. As lighthouses are important to my family, we look forward to sharing this experience with our children. Besides the sense of awe and intrigue we get from visiting lighthouses, there is also a sense of quiet peace and calm that we enjoy. Not only that, there are often opportunities to learn about the history of individual lighthouses and about light-keeping in general, which could help inform important details in my devotional writing.

For my family, especially for my children, these lighthouses we visit could be a tangible representation of the family paradigm of my whole family working together to be a “light in a dark place.” As we try to immerse ourselves fully into the experience, we will also have a Scripture reading about light at each one we visit, and discuss it as a family.

To make it more of an adventure, as we travel from lighthouse to lighthouse, we plan to utilize a camper, which will be pulled by our vehicle. This will allow us to save time at each stop and allow us more downtime to enjoy as a family. Having a kitchen onboard will also help to reduce the costs of eating out all the time, as we’ll be able to cook our own meals, while staying at various campgrounds.

This once-in-a-lifetime trip with my family would be a wonderful opportunity to create important memories, enjoy God’s good creation, help us to learn about our nation’s history, and potentially visit historic churches, as we grow in appreciation and find value in what has come before us, connecting with what previous generations have accomplished.

Besides the Family Trip, Trista and I are planning to have a couple's retreat (without kids), focused on maintaining the health of our marriage. We would reflect on our own time and in our own way to allow us the time and space to intentionally focus on that vital relationship and connection.

C.3 – Renewal Experience for South Shore Trinity

Quoting again from Robert Saler, he writes, "...renewal periods are about more than the pastor's activities on sabbatical. Renewal, if it is to be maximally successful, is a shared endeavor between the pastor and the congregation" (Saler, p. 49). He also shares, "Just as, while on sabbatical, the pastor is invited to step away from the day-to-day demands of ministry and leadership in order to focus deeply on spiritual matters, so too the renewal period can be a time for the congregation to indulge in the blessed luxury of asking questions about joy and meaning" (Saler, p. 53).

Right now, South Shore Trinity is in transition. The congregation will have an opportunity to use this sabbatical time to discuss and reflect on what makes South Shore special, especially considering what it is that makes this church a "Lighthouse of the Gospel" in our community. Because, together, we all make up the body of Christ in this place. And together, we get to fulfill all that God has planned for this church to do. But what might that be?

In conversations with individual Elders about what seems to be missing from our church, their responses were varied, but they all sort of danced around a central theme. If I had to choose one word that summarized all the Elder's responses to this question, the one word I would use is "connectedness." If it was three words, I would say "Lack of connectedness," which prompted me to explore potential ways to address that specific issue.

A potential solution to the lack of connectedness would be to explore the concept of "Inter-generational Ministry." This is ministry that is intentionally connecting with, and doing ministry with, people in a generation or age-group different than your own. It includes investing in, supporting, loving, and walking alongside the Christians who will be teaching the faith to parents, grandparents, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

Engaging in learning about and implementing "Inter-generational Ministry" is something that would need to be overseen by the lay leadership of the church, which is actually a benefit to South Shore Trinity. One of the blessings to the congregation (of a pastoral sabbatical) is having the lay leadership step up to take on the responsibility, and the pleasure, of doing ministry in a pastoral absence.

One avenue the leadership could consider during the sabbatical time could be to bring in a speaker or presenter to give a workshop on what successful inter-generational ministry could look like. There are multiple organizations that specialize in this type of ministry that could be consulted. Another avenue could include a church-wide study of a book like "Who Stole My Church: *What to do When the Church You Love Tries to Enter the 21st Century*" by Gordon MacDonald. Though this book is slightly dated (first published in 2009), this book is a fascinating read about a fictional church navigating the choppy waters of transition and finding and communicating value in a generation other than their own.

Meanwhile, your pastor will be actively working toward achieving healthier spiritual and emotional family health. This is another blessing to the congregation: a well-rested, energized, and inspired pastor.

A pastor who has been building up the spiritual, emotional health of his family to be reaching out to the community with Christ’s love, shining God’s light to those around them. A pastor who can begin to model to South Shore what it would look like for others to have their own family be a lighthouse in their community and neighborhoods.

During the sabbatical, I will be writing devotions about this process and posting them on a blog (www.myhomealighthouse.com), where people inside the church and out could follow along the journey, during and after the sabbatical.

Pastor Dan also plans to teach about this subject in one or more of the following ways: 1.) Teaching a class, along with my wife, to share what we learned, so other families (of any age and size) could also learn some important insights and lessons; 2.) I would hope to use some of this material and process to see if it can be turned into a sermon series to be preached over multiple weekends.

As society continues to change, the darkness of sin is becoming more and more apparent in this world, and in our community. As Pastor Dan is trying to build a spiritual lighthouse in the families of South Shore Trinity (starting first with his own), together we can, like a lighthouse built next to a large body of water, collectively shine the light of Jesus—a beacon of hope—over White Bear Lake and beyond.

Part D – Activities and Timeline

Proposed dates for Sabbatical: June 8, 2024 through September 8, 2024.

I will not be present at the church during the three-month period, and will disconnect from church interactions via phone, email, and social media during that time as well, other than the publishing of blog posts. I will return to my duties here at South Shore Trinity at the beginning of September, but with a gradual engagement, as the re-entry is very important to help solidify the learnings and benefits of the Sabbatical.

Tentative Itinerary - The actual dates these activities take place could potentially move around, but this gives an idea of how it could all fit together.

Dates (month/day/year)	Events or Activities
06/08/24 – 06/14/24	Intentional Rest ¹
06/15/24 – 06/20/24	Begin devotional writing process, potential family camping trip ⁴
06/21/24 – 07/12/24	Great Lakes Family Trip ³
07/13/24 – 07/19/24	Pastor Dan’s “week of solitude” ²
07/20/24 – 07/23/24	Trista’s “days of solitude” ²
07/24/24 – 08/07/24	Downtime ² and Family Time ³
08/08/24 – 08/11/24	Couple’s Retreat (no kids) ³
08/12/24 – 08/18/24	Downtime ² and Family Time ³
08/19/24 – 09/01/24	Personal Ministry Development Time ⁴
09/02/24 – 09/08/24	Re-entry Week – 50% capacity ^{5A}
09/09/24 – and beyond	Conclusion of Sabbatical – 100% capacity. ^{5B} Give Sabbatical presentation.

D. 1 – Intentional Rest

The first week of the Sabbatical will be reserved for an intentional time to decompress, and to rest.

D. 2 – Solitude & Down Time

“Solitude” - The reality of life with young kids often means life, but with the volume turned up. With energy levels high, and personal space seemingly non-existent, both my wife, Trista, and I will be spending time in solitude. Where, exactly, is still to be determined.

“Downtime” - There can be a risk to “over-plan” a time of renewal. Saler writes, “A mistake that many pastors going on sabbatical for the first time make is to pack too many activities into the time period. ...But—and this is crucial—the goals of a renewal leave (revitalization, renewal of rootedness in call, slow growth in spiritual connectedness, etc.) all depend upon a deliberate pace with lots of ‘downtime’ for reflection and processing built in. You don’t want a situation in which the pastor comes back needing a vacation after the sabbatical!” (Saler, p. 43).

D. 3 – Family Time

The theme “My Home A Lighthouse” includes a focus on the family. Not only in rebuilding and reconnecting with my wife and kids, but it also includes reassessing and reprioritizing what we focus on as a family. Meaning time that will be spent on intentional habit-breaking and habit-forming, as we apply and adapt this paradigm of our home, and our family, being a lighthouse to our friends, neighbors, and community.

This family time does include the Great Lakes Family Trip and Couple’s Retreat, as mentioned above, but can also include non-trip time at home during the sabbatical.

D. 4 – Personal Ministry Development Time

The “objective” of South Shore Trinity’s Sabbatical/Study Leave Program states, “This time may be used to reevaluate their ministries or continue further studies in their professional field,” in addition to acknowledging the need for rejuvenating from the unique demands of Pastoral Ministry. So, in hopes of achieving this objective, there is time being set aside to work towards improving and developing my skills and approach to ministry.

The first way, as mentioned above, is developing my skill of writing devotions. The second way is by reviewing and re-reading materials from the “Emergent Leadership” classes I took, pre-covid.

The third way will be to learn and develop what it means to lead from the “second-chair.” In an orchestra setting, there is a musician designated as “first chair” for each instrument. They are the ones who make specific decisions about how to interpret and perform each piece. They lead and set the tone

for everyone else to follow. The “second chair” is the one who sits closest to the “first chair” musician. And they have a specific role and duty to fulfill as well.

This analogy of first and second chair can also be applied to ministry, specifically how an associate pastor (second chair) is to engage in team ministry with the senior pastor (first chair). It can be a challenging balancing act to lead, yet at the same time be subordinate. And this area of expertise is one that I would personally benefit from developing. But also, would benefit the team ministry of South Shore Trinity, as a whole.

What, exactly, this would look like is still being fleshed out. I am continuing to work with my sabbatical coach, Rev. Tim Fangmeier, to develop a plan of action. So far, it includes reading the book “Leading from the Second Chair: Serving Your Church, Fulfilling Your Role, and Realizing Your Dreams” by Mike Bonem and Roger Patterson. There is also a “Cultivating Second Chair Leaders” podcast put out by Karpenko Institute for Nurturing and Developing Leadership Excellence (aka KINDLE). This has 25 episodes that average 30-40 minutes each.

We’ve also discussed the potential of finding and interviewing effective associate pastors, who are thriving in that position, who could give insights into the challenges and joys they have experienced.

I thank God that He has called me to team ministry, and have been blessed by that experience. And growing in knowledge and understanding in leading from the second chair will be a blessing to, not only me personally, but to the ministry of South Shore Trinity.

D. 5 – Return to ministry

The re-entry back into ministry is just as important as the sabbatical itself. I fear, if done too quickly, it could reverse and undo all the good that was accomplished during the renewal experience. So, a process of “ramping up” will be used.

D. 5. A (Week one)

Returning at a 50% capacity, or about 25 hours (3 normal or long days). This would be heavily focused on meeting with, and getting to know, the intentional interim pastor (or vacancy pastor), and discussing what future ministry will look like. It will also include meeting with staff and lay leadership to hear updates. My primary objective this week is just to listen; with no directives and/or advice to be given. I hope to also meet specially with the Board of Elders to hear any spiritual concerns that happened over my sabbatical, including a list of baptisms and deaths.

This week will include no preaching/teaching responsibilities. I will participate in all staff/ministry meetings. This week will also allow any interim leaders to close out their leadership responsibilities. During this week, it would be good to meet individually with leaders who took on certain roles and responsibilities to thank them and receive any updates.

D. 5. B (Week two)

Returning fully to a 100% work-load, I will be resuming full Word and Sacrament Ministry, including preaching. During the worship service, I would like to take time to publicly thank those interim leaders.

Within the first month of being back, I will be giving a short presentation, sharing my experience with the congregation, as best fits the schedule (and thus fulfill the expectation of “Part 2” of South Shore Trinity’s Sabbatical/Study Leave Program Policy). I will also resume full working hours, and begin teaching confirmation the following week.

Part E – Budgeting and expenses – Estimated Total cost: between 15,967 - \$16,973

Breakdown of expenses:

Great Lakes Family Trip (tentatively planned June 21-July 12) – Estimated \$13,670

- **Camper Rental: \$3200**
 - ~\$150/day rental for 21 days
- **Large SUV Rental: \$4000**
 - ~\$190/day rental for 21 days
- **Groceries: \$1000**
 - ~\$50/day
 - Plan to eat meals in camper as we travel
- **Restaurants/Eating Out: \$1000**
 - ~\$50/day
 - Will need to stop to eat out along the way
- **Gas: Estimated between \$625-1000**
 - Lower end is based off of 2500miles at 15mpg, and \$3.75/gal gas prices.
 - Higher end is based off of 2500miles at 10mpg, and \$4.00/gal gas prices.
- **Souvenirs/Gifts: \$1000**
 - \$25/gift shop
 - \$300 Gifts to bring back for staff, and family
 - \$200 for personal spending
- **Campsites: \$1600**
 - Memorial Park Campground \$35 (one night)
 - Chocolay River RV Campground ~\$100 (two nights)
 - Lakeshore RV Campground \$112 (two nights)
 - Bay City State Park Campground ~\$100 (two nights)
 - Lakeport State Park Campground ~\$100 (two nights)
 - Victoria Park Campground \$208 (two nights)

- Port Bay RV Park and Campground \$100 (two nights)
- Yogi Bears Jellystone Park Camp \$206 (two nights)
- Lighthouse Point Campground \$308 (two nights)
- Weko Beach Campground \$100 (two nights)
- Wisconsin Dells KOA Holiday Campground \$210 (two nights)
- **Passports for whole family: \$330(Card) or \$870(Book)**
 - 4 Kids:
 - Book: \$540
 - Application Fee: \$100 (x4)
 - Acceptance Fee: \$35 (x4)
 - Card: \$200
 - Application Fee: \$15 (x4)
 - Acceptance Fee: \$35 (x4)
 - 2 Adults
 - Book: \$330
 - Application Fee: \$130(x2)
 - Acceptance Fee: \$35 (x2)
 - Card: \$130
 - Application Fee: \$30 (x2)
 - Acceptance Fee: \$35 (x2)

Pastor Dan's Week of Solitude - at our land up north – Estimated \$165

- Groceries: \$100
- Gas: \$65

Trista's 4-Day Solitude - Rest and Relaxation at hotel – Estimated \$705

- Hotel: \$600
- Gas: \$5
- Eating Out: \$100

Pastor Dan and Trista's Couple's Retreat – Estimated \$890

- Hotel: \$625
- Gas: \$65
- Eating Out: \$200

Potential cost increases from when first researched

- 10% - (of \$15,430) = \$1,543
- 10% - (of \$14,515) = \$1,452

Appendix I

Policy Number: SS-840501-A
Date of Approval : 2015
Approved By: Planning Board

South Shore Trinity Lutheran Church Sabbatical/Study Leave Program

Objective: To provide opportunity for the Senior Pastor and Associate Pastor, after a determined period of time of service in the congregation, to spend time away from the congregation as a means to rejuvenate from the unique demands of the Pastoral Ministry. This time may be used to reevaluate their ministries or continue further studies in their professional field. The congregation recognizes that the good stewardship and care of the Lord's under shepherds contributes towards their better health, happier and more stable family life, and more effective shepherding of the souls of the congregation.

1. After five (5) years of continuous service at South Shore Trinity Lutheran Church, a "sabbatical/study leave" of up to three (3) consecutive months will be offered to the Senior and Associate Pastor with pay (pay to include base salary, housing, and benefits). Service time will begin to accrue again after returning from the sabbatical.
2. The Pastors will submit in writing for approval by the congregation a statement as to how they plan to use the "sabbatical/study leave". This written request should be approved by the congregation at least six (6) months prior to the start of the leave so that adequate provisions for service and financial needs can be met by the congregation. In working on the written proposal, the pastors should consider consulting with other people such as other staff members, fellow pastors, and District and Synod executives for possible input and suggestions. The Pastors are ~~encouraged~~ ^{expected} to share their experience with the congregation at the end of their sabbatical.
3. The congregation may establish an escrow account in anticipation of the financial need during the "sabbatical/study leave" period of time. The annual amount to be determined by the Planning Board for inclusion in the annual budget.
4. The Planning Board, through the Board of Elders, will periodically evaluate the effectiveness of this program for any adjustments necessary.

Bibliography

Saler, Robert C. "Planning Sabbaticals: A Guide for Congregations and Their Pastor". Saint Louis, Missouri, Chalice Press, 2019.