

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## PASTOR TEX'S UPCOMING SABBATICAL

### **What is a sabbatical?**

The word *sabbatical* has its roots in the Biblical concept of Sabbath (“to rest” or “to cease”). Sabbath keeping is setting aside time that God consecrates and makes holy. Sabbatical is a time for Pastor Tex to shift gears, to experience a change in perspective, to receive spiritual nourishment, and to deepen his relationship with God, himself, and his family. Sabbath includes elements of rest, disengagement, study, exploration, reflection and prayer.

Although some components of a sabbatical may sound a bit like vacation, a sabbatical is not a vacation from the church. This is an opportunity for the pastor to reconnect with parts of his life that are important, such as his sense of call, his vocation, and the roots of his spiritual journey. Part of sabbatical is stepping away from the professional side of religious life and spending time focusing on the pastor's personal life of faith. It is a time for spiritual growth, for renewal of body, mind and spirit. It is time away to reflect on the balance in a pastor's life (emotional, financial, intellectual, physical, social spiritual and vocational), recognizing that sometimes with a pastor's schedule and responsibilities, life does get out of balance. The intent of the sabbatical is that Pastor Tex will return to the congregation refreshed and renewed, ready to move forward into the next phase of our life together.

### **Are sabbaticals for clergy common?**

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Southwestern Texas Synod encourage sabbaticals for rostered leaders every seven years of ministry. ELCA churches are paying more attention to the care and long-term support of their professional leaders; consequently, a growing number of clergy and lay rostered leaders are taking sabbaticals.

### **How long will Pastor Tex be gone?**

His sabbatical is three months, beginning on July 1<sup>st</sup> and ending on September 30<sup>th</sup>. His first Sunday back will be October 4<sup>th</sup>.

### **What will Pastor Tex do on sabbatical?**

He has planned a variety of activities (and non-activities) during his three months away, alternating invigorating experiences with periods of rest and deliberate reflection. For a week in July, he will focus on rediscovering his own roots, spending time with his extended family, and revisiting the places and people that nurtured his faith and call to pastoral ministry. He plans to read and jumpstart his old hobby of cycling. He will also spend a week at an Alban Institute seminar for shaping the long pastorate.

During August, Pastor Tex will take a pilgrimage to Germany to explore the Luther sites, something he has long wanted to do. He plans to take lots of pictures that he can use in this winter's adult education course on the core of Lutheranism. Later in August, he will leave for a three-week silent retreat at a Benedictine Center in Ohio. He looks forward to spending time meeting with a spiritual guide, reading, and cherishing quality reflection and prayer opportunities.

Pastor Tex will spend the last two weeks of his sabbatical writing, resting, and catching up on reading, mostly theology and ministry books. He will also spend time reflecting on his sabbatical experience, planning how to keep balance in his own life. His wife, Alice, and their children will join him for part of this time.

This sabbatical was planned over several months in conversation with the Mutual Ministry Committee, the Congregation Council, and the Bishop's Office. It has been approved by the Congregation Council.

### **Who will lead worship for these three months?**

Retired Pastor Anderson will lead worship and preside at Holy Communion during the months of July and September. Our neighboring congregation's Pastor Lopez will be with us on the first and third Sundays in

August to celebrate Holy Communion. Lay leaders from the congregation will lead worship on other Sundays in August.

### **Who will cover pastoral care needs when Pastor Tex is gone?**

People are encouraged to notify the church office, during regular office hours, of needs for pastoral visits. Either a Stephen Minister or Pastor Anderson will make these visits, depending on the situation. Hospital calls are being covered by pastors from our neighboring congregations and by our own Stephen Ministers. Pastors Anderson, Lopez, and other local pastors are ready and able to provide pastoral services (such as pastoral care, funerals, baptisms or weddings) in Pastor Tex's absence.

### **What happens if we have a pastoral emergency?**

The church office secretary, Debbie Schmidt, knows which pastors or other resources in the area are available for emergencies. The congregational president, Lupe Brown, can be contacted at any time.

### **Who will administer the congregation in Pastor Tex's absence?**

The congregational president, executive committee, congregation council, and staff each have particular roles in administering the congregation during Pastor Tex's sabbatical. The council has the authority to make decisions concerning the congregation.

### **What are the benefits to the congregation of the pastor's sabbatical?**

A sabbatical is investing in the future of the pastor and the congregation. There is mutual benefit when pastors are granted a sabbatical. Pastors stay vital and growing, spiritually and professionally. Pastor Tex is taking time for family, for reading and prayer, for learning new skills, for exercise, and for some extended reflection time. Healthy pastors enhance the life and ministry of the congregations they serve. Most pastors return from sabbaticals with renewed energy and enthusiasm for ministry. They come back relaxed and refreshed, with new ideas, updated skills, and a fresh perspective on the congregation. They also have had opportunity to cultivate a deeper relationship with God, self and family.

Congregations often experience change or refreshment during the pastor's sabbatical as well. People gain confidence in their leadership abilities. Lay leadership can be expanded in new and creative ways. New people are willing to try new things or experiment with different ways of approaching traditional ministries. The congregation has opportunity to experience new voices in preaching and teaching, and in the pastor's absence, folks see ministry from different, expansive perspectives.

### **Who covers the expenses of the sabbatical?**

Full compensation and benefits, excluding travel reimbursement, for Pastor Tex will continue through the sabbatical. The pastoral services for worship leadership, preaching, and pastoral care are covered by the congregation. Because of good planning over the past few years, the congregation has set aside funds to cover these expenses. Pastor Tex has some continuing education funds that will help with his travel and educational expenses. The remaining expenses for the sabbatical are covered by Pastor Tex.

### **Will Pastor Tex be in contact with the congregation when he's on sabbatical?**

No. Sabbaticals are meant to be a time away from the congregation and the routines of pastoral ministry. The congregational leadership has made arrangements for pastoral needs to be covered in his absence so he will be able to take full advantage of his time away. The congregational president will be able to reach Pastor Tex in the unexpected event that this is necessary.

### **How do I find out more about sabbaticals?**

Members of the Mutual Ministry Committee and the Executive Committee can share more information. Pastor Tex also plans to share his sabbatical reflections with the congregation upon his return in October.

Much of the information on this FAQ sheet was taken from *Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning*, by A. Richard Bullock and Richard J. Bruesehoff, Alban: 2000.