

PSW Region – E-Newsletter March 2014
Stewardship Message from Dan Oliver

SABBATICAL...New Life For You & Your Congregation!

Considering Sabbath Time

Dear Pastors and Congregations,

Do you know... the Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis is now administering the Lilly Endowment Clergy Renewal Program, and,

California clergy may now apply.
It's not too late for the 2014 granting cycle.

To explore this opportunity, go to the CTS website. Under "About CTS", click on Center for Pastoral Excellence and then find out more about the National Clergy Renewal Program (there are 2 programs one for Indiana and one for the rest of the United States). Grant applications are due April 9th. Congregations/Pastors can apply for up to \$50,000.

Please take a moment to read the following message about an exciting possibility that may be available to you. This message includes some unique insights from my dear friend and Northern California colleague, Dan Paul, pastor at Pacific Grove CC. This is the story of Dan's sabbatical taken last fall.

Dan (Oliver) - Your PSWR Minister of Stewardship and Giving
(Celebrating a Culture of Gratitude and Generosity in our Region and beyond!)

A Word from Dan (Paul): REFLECTIONS ON SUCCESSFUL SABBATICAL

When I accepted the call to serve as the pastor of The Christian Church of Pacific Grove I had a brief conversation with the regional minister Chuck Blaisdell concerning negotiating my contract with the church. He had one major suggestion - "Make sure your contract includes the word sabbatical."

According to the suggested guidelines of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) General Commission on Ministry *"Most Regions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) encourage a three-month Sabbatical/Renewal Leave after five years of ministry. Regardless of the duration, it is vital the leave be taken as a continuous, uninterrupted block of time."* No pastor in the century-old Pacific Grove church had ever requested sabbatical time, so my request to the board was not expected. Fortunately, a couple members of the board at the time worked for universities and were quite familiar with the concept and the benefit of the sabbatical. With a little careful and prayerful negotiation, we agreed that I would take a three-month sabbatical every five years. And I have.

I recently returned from a three-month sabbatical that was renewing and impactful for me and my career and even more, it was a **powerful experience for the congregation**. I can attest that the congregation is in BETTER shape than I left it. And, I am in better shape for the shape I'm in. The congregation and I seem to have found a more hopeful and energetic spirit as a result of this sabbatical time.

The General Commission on Ministry suggests: *A pre-sabbatical planning process that enhances skills of church leadership is vital for the success of the leave.* The Pastor/Congregation Relations committee suggested that I make a list of all my duties - contracted and uncontracted that would need to be done while I was away. Regular meeting with the Elders insured that they were willing to safeguard the integrity of Sunday morning worship and pastoral care to the congregation. I had spent many hours composing a sabbatical grant application. Although, the grant was not awarded (for some mysterious reason, California churches were not eligible for Lilly Grants last year) I did have a clear vision of what I had hoped to accomplish personally during the sabbatical. My proposal was that I wanted to place myself geographically in the places important in church history that I often read about, teach about and preach about, but had never visited. I wanted to walk the same paths and streets of Jesus of Nazareth, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Alexander Campbell. Because it was required for the grant proposal, I had a budget. Importantly, I had regular meetings with church moderator Neal Heckman and the executive officers of the congregation as plans developed. And more importantly, Neal and the executive officers were encouraging and enthusiastic. Through their diligence to this preparation I realized the love they have for this church and for me.

The General Commission on Ministry also suggests: *A retired minister might be delighted to serve the congregation in the minister's absence, knowing that this service would be for a short period of time. Some may even see such special service as a calling within their call.* Just as I was considering who this retired minister might be, our church asked the Board of Church Extension to help us develop a capital campaign and soon Jim Powell was asked to coach us through that development. I felt intuitively that Jim would be a perfect person to serve in this special capacity. At the time I was confident that I would receive a grant and could compensate him reasonably. When I learned that the Lilly Grant was out of the question, I called Jim to give him the bad news. In a comforting, pastoral way he told me of his brother managing to raise enough money to take a sabbatical without a grant. More importantly, (and this was a gift from the Holy Spirit) he said, *"Dan, I just listened to Fred Craddock tell a group of retired clergy that we need to find ways to creatively serve the church. If you are able to raise enough money to do the traveling you hope for, let's not make compensating me be a stumbling block."* I am grateful for the words of Fred Craddock and the heart of Jim Powell.

Because we had just launched a capital campaign at the church, Neal, the Pastor/Congregation Relations Committee and I agreed that it was a bad time to

solicit sabbatical funds from members of the congregation. But I was able to ask family and friends to make charitable contributions to a sabbatical fund at the church, I was able to save 18 months of wedding/funeral/chaplaincy income just for the sabbatical and I was able to do a fundraising concert at The First Christian Church of Sacramento.

Jim explained to the congregation that they were having a "Stay-battical" and he led them skillfully through a three-month conversation of self-discovery. His fresh eyes helped us all see things about ourselves we hadn't seen before. His calling to the ministry poured out a major dose of love and compassion into the life of this church. At the conclusion of the sabbatical, Jim provided me a detailed appraisal of the spirit of the congregation that was both lovely and challenging - this is a good church and at the verge of becoming a great church. He and Peggy were also touched by the unconditional love afforded to them from the congregation.

This sabbatical was successful because WE planned carefully and were open to the nudges of the Spirit. Neal, the board officers, Jim and I were as thoughtful and clear as we could be about the expectations we had of one another - and none of us sweated the small stuff. Because of the careful planning and the guiding hand of the Spirit I am pleased to say that for three months I never had a difficult day. My texts with the church were minimal and I was completely off duty as a congregational pastor. The careful planning included making sure that I never over scheduled myself so I was constantly focused on learning, journaling and self-care.

When I speak about taking the sabbatical, I have heard too many colleagues say "Yeah, I need to do that sometime." Or I hear sisters and brothers of the church say, "I don't think our church could offer that to our pastor." Permit me to argue - the sabbatical may be one of the best investments the pastor and the congregation makes in the pastor and the congregation. Thanks be to God, my mentors and my dear church I can make this argument first-hand.