



October 2016 Message for Congregations and Lay and Rostered Leaders

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ –

At its March 2016 meeting Synod Council approved my request for a sabbatical leave, November 1, 2016-January 31, 2017. What follows is a shortened, edited version of my proposal to Synod Council:

A Sabbatical Leave Proposal: Unwrapping the Gift of a Sabbatical Leave

*And after [Jesus] had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray.
When evening came, he was there alone.
Matthew 14:23*

Prologue

The Sabbath pattern - six days of work, followed by one of rest - is woven deep into the fabric of the Bible - it is seen, fundamentally, as a gift! The root word means to cease, to desist. The idea is not that of relaxation or refreshment, but cessation from activity. The first story of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures (Genesis 1-2:4a) climaxes on the seventh day, the first time there was a seventh day. Having created everything, God rests, and blesses this day, and makes it holy.

Later, God teaches the people of Israel to share in the blessing of this day (Exodus 16). After bringing them out of Egyptian slavery into the wilderness, God sends them manna, commanding them to gather enough each morning for that day's food alone. Mistrusting, they gather more than they need, but it rots. On the sixth day, however, they are told to gather enough to last for two days. Miraculously, the extra does not rot, and those mistrustful ones who go out on the seventh morning to gather more food find none. God is teaching them, through their own hunger and nature's provisions, to keep the Sabbath, even before Moses receives the commandments on Sinai.

When those commandments come, the Sabbath commandment is the longest and, in some ways, the most puzzling. Unlike any of the others, it takes quite different forms in the two passages where the Ten Commandments appear. Both versions require the same behavior - work on six days, rest on one, but each gives a different reason. What is wonderful is that each reason arises from a fundamental truth about God's relationship to humanity.

The Exodus commandment (Exodus 20:8-11) to "remember" the Sabbath day is grounded in the story of creation. The human pattern of six days of work and one of rest follows God's pattern as creator; God's people are to rest on one day because God did. In both work and rest, human beings are in the image of God. At the same time, they are not God but God's creatures, who must honor God by obeying this commandment.

In Deuteronomy, the commandment (Deuteronomy 5:12-15) to “observe” the Sabbath day is tied to the experience of a people newly released from bondage. Slaves cannot take a day off; free people can. When they stop work every seventh day, the people will remember that the Lord brought them out of slavery, and they will see to it that no one within their own dominion, not even animals, will work without respite. Sabbath is a recurring testimony against the drudgery of slavery.

Together, these two renderings of the Sabbath commandment summarize the most fundamental stories and beliefs of the Scriptures: creation and exodus, humanity in God’s image and a people liberated from captivity. In both remembering and observing, the Sabbath is understood to be gift.

Later, Christians continued to treasure the Sabbath commandment, along with the other nine commandments from Sinai. They also came to believe, however, that its meaning had changed with the new creation God began with Christ’s death and resurrection. The holy day from now on, therefore, was not the seventh but the eighth, the day on which the future burst into the present.

Unwrapping the Gift

Unwrapping the gift of a Sabbatical leave means for me, first of all, understanding - or seeing - such a “time” as this woven into the biblical stories of creation, exodus and resurrection. Whether we know the term “Sabbath” or not, we, the harried citizens of the 21st century, yearn for this reality. We need Sabbath, even though we doubt that we have time for it. As your Bishop, ministering with you and among you, I yearn for a time of Sabbath. I yearn for an opportunity to reflect on my call to ministry, specifically to episcopal ministry, to prayerfully consider God’s relationship with me and my relationship with God, and to reflect on my relationship with God’s people - specifically to a community named and called, The Synod of Alberta and the Territories.

Unwrapping the gift of a Sabbatical leave brings with it a deep sense of gratitude and thanksgiving for me. To be serving with and among a community of faith with the means and the will to offer such a gift means more than words can adequately express. Thank-you! This is a gift not only for me, but for Cathy. And on her behalf, I say thank-you!

Unwrapping the gift of a Sabbatical leave brings with it questions too! I confess that I am somewhat anxious about not being with you. Today, at this vantage point, I question how I will “leave” well, and how I will “re-enter” well. Know that I will miss you! I will be wondering how God is working in your lives and in the life of each community of faith and each ministry. I will need your prayers for myself, for Cathy and our family. I will be praying for you constantly!

And finally, unwrapping the gift of a Sabbatical leave means that this time is also a gift for you, The Synod of Alberta and the Territories. As individuals share their gifts our community will be blessed. As people work together in order that ministry is done, relationships will be built. As our Synod continues to explore and live in to its mission priorities of Spirit-Led Leadership, Hope-Filled Discipleship, Innovative Tradition and Collaborative Partnerships ministry will be explored in perhaps new, exciting and challenging ways.

Sabbatical Leave

I have named, and Synod Council has supported, The Rev. Dr. Julianne Barlow, Assistant to the Bishop for Mission to serve as Commissary while I am away. She will have the same responsibilities and be similarly accountable in this capacity for the three months of Sabbatical leave. In addition, while

meeting with the Conference of Deans in September we be reviewing our Synod's Call Process as well as other agenda items given that I will be away.

I know that you will keep Julianne and Darla Wildfang, Executive Assistant, and each of our synod staff in your prayers.

I will not be receiving correspondence nor be in communication during these three months.

Goals of the Sabbatical Leave

As our Sabbatical Leave Policy states: "The purpose of the sabbatical leave will be to provide a respite from the demands of work and routine and renewal of self. It is not intended that a course of study be undertaken during this time, although this is not precluded."

Cathy and I will be welcoming this period of time away together in warmer climates where our Spanish can be put into practice. We are planning that our children would join us for two weeks in this locale.

A regular part of the Sabbatical leave will be time for prayer, reflection and journaling.

One of my greater sins has been the neglect of my own physical well being. Consistency in exercise and in care of my body will also be part of the Sabbatical leave.

Conclusion

I look forward to ministering with you, and among you, upon my return! I am confident that even then, we will continue exploring together this gift of Sabbath - unwrapping the gift of a Sabbatical leave - and seeing such a "time" as this woven into the biblical stories of creation, exodus and resurrection.

In Christ –
Shalom,

+Bishop Larry Kochendorfer

*The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.
Romans 15:13*