

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 leave is a time for the pastor to shift gears in order to rest, disengage, study, reflect, and travel in order to return to minister among us refreshed and renewed in body, mind, and spirit. Tom’s agreement with Trinity specifies that he will take a sabbatical within the first 5-7 years of his service. The year 2012 will be Tom’s seventh year at Trinity.

Sabbatical is more than a break from meetings, budgets, sermons, and so on. It is a time for Tom to receive spiritual nourishment and a change in perspective, to deepen his relationship with God, himself, and his family – a season of spiritual growth. This special time will also be a season of growth for the entire congregation.

It is also important to know what sabbatical is not. It is not a time for routine work, mid-career assessment, job search, retirement planning, extended vacation, or terminal leave. It is not a “reward” or a job bonus. It is a planned time of intensive enhancement for ministry and mission.

DO OTHER CLERGY GO ON SABBATICAL?

Yes they do. In fact, our presbytery has a sabbatical leave policy for all clergy in the presbytery, encouraging sessions to grant compensated sabbatical after six years of service to an individual church. The presbytery’s policy states the following: “A sabbatical will enable the minister to be

renewed through the vital pursuit of continuing education, extended time spent in spiritual formation, and fresh mentoring by respected teachers. A sabbatical enables a minister to return to the responsibilities of the parish with new energy, spiritual vision and effectiveness”.

HOW LONG WILL TOM BE GONE?

The exact dates have yet to be determined. However, the team is looking at starting the sabbatical around the first week of May through mid-August, 2012.

WHAT WILL TOM BE DOING ON HIS SABBATICAL?

While the details are still being worked out, Tom, (in consultation with the session and sabbatical team), has divided his time into three major components. The first is rest – spending significant time with immediate and extended family, rekindling important friendships, and recovery of sleep; the second is personal spiritual renewal – extended time with the Lord, taking spiritual retreats, getting spiritual direction, devoting oneself to personal prayer and study. The third is reengagement with the theological roots of Tom’s call to ministry. Tom hopes to make an extensive study of the impact of the Reformation on the practice of some of the classical spiritual disciplines; namely contemplative prayer, solitude, fasting, silence, and meditation. This study includes interviews and conversations with some of the most prominent and leading theologians (Protestant and Catholic) of our day in the US and Europe. It is the hope that the study will produce a useful educational tool for other churches to use. Some of those interviewed have already agreed to come to Alaska following the sabbatical as our “theologians-in-residence”.

WHO WILL COVER TOM'S RESPONSIBILITIES DURING HIS ABSENCE?

In cooperation with the presbytery, the session is contracting with Reverend Tamara Letts to provide the primary pastoral oversight while Tom is gone. The sabbatical team is currently drafting a detailed "Who Does What" plan which will be in place before Tom leaves. The session will communicate all necessary details as to how the ministry will continue to thrive in the absence of Tom (and Tammy when she is also gone).

WHO WILL BE PAY FOR THE SABBATICAL?

Trinity is blessed to have received a special grant from the Lilly Foundation to cover all related expenses for Tom's sabbatical. Any extra expenses will be covered personally by the Letts'.

WILL TOM BE IN CONTACT WITH TRINITY DURING HIS SABBATICAL?

An important part of a sabbatical is to make a complete break from things. However, the team believes that staying connected to the Trinity family is vital for not only Tom's growth but for the growth of the congregation. Given the modern use of technology, Tom will be able to occasionally (not necessarily regularly) connect through Facebook, blogs, and an occasional SKYPE on a Sunday morning.

WILL TOM'S FAMILY GO WITH HIM?

Unfortunately, due to work and school commitments, Tom's family will have to stay home or at school for much of the sabbatical time. Tom will be together with his family right at the beginning of the sabbatical (their daughter's graduation from college) and during

the final portion of the sabbatical and for vacation.

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT THE SABBATICAL?

A team of folks creatively called, "the sabbatical team" are available and willing to share more about the sabbatical. Please ask anyone on the team and, of course, Tom or Tammy. As the plans grow and develop, more information will be made available to the congregation.

WHO IS ON THE TEAM?

Suzy Zumbro - Chair
Todd Carter
JoAnn Bantz
Mike Forbes
Barb Clubb
Alison Lausten
Todd Hardesty
Lee Huskey
Tammy Letts