

Lakeview Sabbatical Announcement, 8/9/2015

Scripture Background

At creation God established a rhythm for us to work 6 days and not work on the 7th for our rest, rejuvenation, refreshment, *and* refocus on Him. He confirmed this in the 10 commandments, and in the Mosaic law He even gave instruction for having the land rest a year every 7 years. Even Jesus would take time away from ministry to be alone with His Father. So we see many times in scripture where we are encouraged to have proper rest balancing the good work God has called us to do.

Recent Background

At April's Elder meeting one of the elders felt led to encourage us all to pray right then for Pastor Todd, which we did. After we finished praying Pastor Todd let us know he had been having some difficulties focusing on his work, making decisions, and generally feeling a bit overwhelmed. We agreed to continue praying about this and try to think of ways to relieve some workload. Todd was away at Annual Council when we had our May Elder meeting. At June's meeting Todd reported that since these issues had worsened he consulted with his doctor who identified several symptoms of depression. Todd consulted with our North East District Superintendent David Linn who recommended a sabbatical for the mutual health of the congregation and Pastor Todd. Todd researched pastoral sabbaticals and shared that information with the Elders at the June meeting. At our request Todd then drafted a thorough sabbatical proposal which during July the Elders reviewed, researched on our own, discussed, revised, and came to agreement with Todd on a plan which we're announcing today.

Sabbatical Is and Isn't

There are many different descriptions of a pastoral sabbatical, and this is one from the Central District's Policy Handbook: "A sabbatical is a time set aside from normal ministry to provide an opportunity for spiritual refreshment, personal growth, professional development, and/or project design. It is intended to provide a full-time official worker serving in the local church the privilege to nurture spiritual life, pursue professional development, and reflect on big-picture initiatives." Although policies vary, many churches have a Sabbatical planned for every 7th year of the minister's service. A sabbatical is not merely a long vacation. It is not for pursuing educational degrees or credited continuing education. It is not a time to look for another job or ministry. It should be a time to truly and completely disconnect from routines, responsibilities and relationships.

Sabbatical Plan Announcement

The Elders have decided to grant Pastor Todd a 3 month pastoral sabbatical which will start tomorrow Aug. 10 through Nov. 10. We apologize for the apparent suddenness of this announcement, but felt it best to avoid potential "one-last-thing-before-you-go" requests of Todd. During this time Todd will not be attending Lakeview's ministries, nor will he be intentionally meeting with people from the church. This is necessary to achieve the three goals for Pastor Todd's sabbatical: Rest/Renewal, Refreshment, and Refocus.

Rest/Renewal: During the rest of August, after seeing Martha and Dan off to college this week, the goal is to simply disengage from the daily/weekly ministry demands and allow true rest and healing to come to his body and soul. He will seek the Lord through reading and prayer, but there will be no alarms or schedules.

Refreshment: The goal of this time is to engage in meaningful productive activities that Todd's pastoral schedule has not permitted him to do. From September 8th - 25th he will be attending ALONGSIDE retreat near Kalamazoo, Michigan. ALONGSIDE is a counseling retreat ministry for pastors and missionaries who are in need of renewal and restoration, which occurs through personal counseling, educational seminars, and group interaction. These retreats are specifically designed to meet the physical, spiritual, and emotional needs in a safe place where caring, licensed professional counselors come alongside these Christian leaders as they seek healing and renewed strength and energy for ministry. After Alongside, he plans to spend time writing an unfinished book and another book he has outlined, and to also work in his woodshop on a piece of furniture... but again with no associated deadlines.

Refocus: The last, though most important goal is to hear from God what's next. Although this is a focus the entire time, Todd will be more intentional about this the final month. The "what next" questions he has in mind are: What's next for him personally? What's next for his family? What's next for him as a pastor? What's next for us as a church? Todd will visit other churches and listen to other pastors speak God's Word, worship with them and see how other local churches are expressing the body of Christ. Our hope and expectation is that God will lead, and God will speak.

Congregational Benefits

There are many benefits the Elders anticipate for the congregation. First, that we find a new appreciation for our pastor in his absence, realizing the multiple responsibilities, tasks and assignments in which he's been engaged. Second, that we'd gain a new understanding of how well the church body can function as a whole, giving opportunity for greater spiritually-gifted involvement. Third, that we will lessen our dependency on Pastor Todd, understanding our dependency needs to be on God and His spiritual-gifting to the hearts, minds, hands & feet of everyone in our congregation; like those in the small-groups in which we're involved, and the many people in leadership positions here. Fourth, that we'd find a refreshed Pastor Todd upon his return. Although Todd has strongly confirmed his desire to remain in his position at Lakeview, in other circumstances a Sabbatical time improves the retention of ministers who know the flock and community, but might otherwise leave their post due to stress and sense of burnout without this renewal time, which interrupts effective growth of the congregation's ministries.

Sabbatical Conditions

Todd and the Elders have agreed that:

- Todd will be relieved of his regular responsibilities at Lakeview for the time of the sabbatical, and will instead perform the activities to achieve the goals outlined above.
- Todd will complete a minimum full year of ministry at Lakeview after the sabbatical, though we're all hopeful for more than that.
- Todd will provide a brief/simple status report to the elders every other week if possible, except during the 21-day *Alongside* retreat.
- Lakeview will continue to supply the Pastor's benefit package.

Job Coverage

The speakers we plan for the next 13 Sundays include Jeremiah Murphy a couple times in August, each of the 5 elders a couple times each, and one more Sunday to be determined.

Todd has already prepared a list of his weekly duties and recommendations for coverage. The Elders have met with Charlotte to plan the Office coverage. The Elders will be contacting some of you to help with the few tasks that are not yet assigned.

Todd's usual attendance and communication between the monthly committee meetings will be covered by those already on those committees, overseen by the Elders.

What should we not do?

To make this time most effective for Pastor Todd and his family, please refrain from:

- Attempting to contact Todd. Todd will not be checking or returning any church email, texts, or phone calls during the sabbatical. His church email and cell phone answering message will send an automatic reply with instructions on how to contact the office if necessary. During office hours (Tuesday through Friday 10 AM-3 PM) you can call the church office. Charlotte will either guide you on whom to call or contact the appropriate person for you. The elders will be available for prayer and spiritual counseling. Reach out to your small group leaders. If there are issues beyond the scope of our elders, we have several professional Christian counselors we can refer you to for counseling.
- Discussing how things are at church at the inevitable chance meeting. If you see Todd, please say Hi and do what you would normally do when you see someone you know and care about. We'll have plenty of time to catch up on "church-stuff" after the sabbatical is over.
- Asking Patti or Clayton how Todd's doing. Since so many will want to ask, they would find themselves answering that question many, many times over during the sabbatical. Between our gracious God and your prayers, let's trust he will be doing well. Since the elders will be preaching often, we will have the opportunity to periodically update everyone at once.

What do we do?

What should we as the body of Christ do?

- Perceive Correctly. Understand the reasoning and the need for pastoral sabbaticals, and their usefulness in healthy long-term pastorates. We'll mention more resources in a minute.
- Pray Ceaselessly. Both pastor and congregation need to pray that God would restore Todd both physically and spiritually, provide renewed vision for the years ahead, and provide sustaining strength for those who will be taking on additional responsibilities during this time.
- Participate Consistently. This is a new opportunity to realize that "we are the church!" Allow this to be a time when you embrace this concept. Volunteer. Join a small group. Provide a ride or a meal. Pray, invest and invite the people on your Pi2 card. Do something special for your neighbor. Invite a friend to Starting Point. Ask one of the elders or other leaders if there is anything special you can do. We plan to post and notify you of tasks we need help with.

For More Information

On the information table in the back you'll find several resources related to this event. There is a 4-page Frequently Asked Questions document with more details about this sabbatical, an excellent pamphlet from Focus on the Family "Sabbaticals for Ministers", and a prayer card with reminders of specific things to pray for Todd during each phase of this time. If after reviewing these materials you still have questions, please contact any of the Elders here.

Please join us in prayer.