

# **Sabbatical Report**

**Sabbatical Report \* Pastor  
Keith Ruehlow \* January-  
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**“ Jesus ordered (his disciples)  
not to leave Jerusalem, but to  
wait there for the promise of  
the Father... (He said to them)  
you will receive power when  
the Holy Spirit has come upon  
you; and you will be my  
witnesses in Jerusalem, in all  
Judea and Samaria, and to the  
ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:4,8)**

These are the last words Jesus offers his disciples before ascending up into heaven out of their sight. They conclude important days spent with the disciples after his death and resurrection. Jesus' last directions to his friends were quite specific - wait in Jerusalem for the gift of the Holy Spirit! And when that gift in a mighty rush of wind at Pentecost filled the room and their lives, the disciples came alive in a new way. They were empowered

for mission and ministry in unforeseen ways!

I have found great excitement in the stories of these disciples from the Book of Acts this Easter. The Holy Spirit moved them from locked and closed doors out into lives of proclaiming the good news of their Risen Lord. The Spirit gave them new power to heal and cast out unclean spirits. The Spirit gave them new courage to teach despite all efforts by the authorities to silence them. The breath of God blew into the disciples' lives and they became leaders and not just followers.

As I have reflected on my recently completed sabbatical time, I believe that God put me into a place where the Holy Spirit could breathe new life into my life and ministry. Just as the apostles in the early days of the church brought a new passion into their work of spreading the good news of the Gospel, so I believe I have returned after 3 months away with a renewed sense of call and purpose.

### **A Quick Review of Sabbatical**

## **Objectives:**

These were the goals I set for myself in preparing for the sabbatical time.

### **Personal Spiritual Renewal -**

Practicing “tools of discipleship”, experiencing worship “from the pew”, time in retreat, reading on the topic of spiritual growth

### **Professional Renewal -**

Examining the topic of Small Group Ministry, explore what other congregations are doing for contemporary worship, computer training

### **Sabbath Rest & Renewal -**

Time away for and with family, personal reading, time for cross-country skiing and racquetball

## **A Grace-Filled Time Away...**

I can describe my time in sabbatical in the following 5 ways:

- 1. Worship Opportunities:**
2. I had the chance to worship in 10 different churches during the sabbatical. They included the following:

Normandale Lutheran  
Church- Twin Cities,  
Chapel of the Incarnation-  
Luther Seminary, Salem  
Lutheran-Shell Lake,  
Central & Our Savior's  
Lutheran-Chippewa Falls,  
First Lutheran-Cumberland,  
St. John's-Bloomer, Zoar  
Lutheran-Tofte, MN,  
Bethlehem Lutheran-Grand  
Marais, MN and First  
Lutheran-Baron.

These were both large and small congregations in a variety of settings rural and urban. Worshipping “from the pew” was a great chance to experience what other congregations are doing. I was especially interested in other congregation's alternative worship services. It was interesting to note how several churches were utilizing technology in their services with big screens for music and/or sermon visuals. I also tried to pay attention to how welcome I felt there.

3. What really struck me in my visits was how each congregation was doing worship in a way which fit their setting and gifts. There is no one way which makes it right!!

**4. Study/Growth Opportunities:**

During sabbatical I had the chance to participate in the following events:

- Luther Seminary Convocation (January 7-9)  
*“Living Out Our Callings at Home”*  
This was a chance to hear speakers and participate in workshops focusing on how faith is lived out in the everyday setting of our home and families.
- Luther Seminary Kairos (Jan 26-30)  
*“Enneagram: For Personal Spiritual Growth and Improved Interpersonal Relationships”* This was a seminar that introduced me to a new way of exploring the gifts God has given us and the ways we are called to live them out. Time was

spent on how our strengths influence our style of leadership

- ARC Retreat Center - Stanchfield, Minnesota  
Time for prayer, devotion, silence, reflection
- Alban Institute (Feb. 17-20)  
*“Spirituality of Leadership: Leading from Within”* I ventured out to Danville, California for this continuing education event. It was a great four days in conversation with other clergy from a great variety of faith traditions. I was the sole Lutheran.

**1. Valuable Reading Time:**

During sabbatical I was able to spend a great deal of time in reading especially in the area of faith practices and Small Group Ministry. The book I read to begin my time away and actually reread at the end was called *“A Graceful Life - Lutheran Spirituality for Today.”* It was a wonderful reminder of the gifts, of what author Bradley Hanson calls, a Lutheran Spirituality. He concludes his book in the

following way: “Healthy Lutheran spirituality is a way of life full of God’s overflowing grace. Being grounded in that generous divine love makes it possible for us to move gracefully through the joys and sorrows of life.” (p. 188)

My sabbatical reading also included a more intentional time for devotional reading of scripture. It was good to have extended time to read the Bible not for sermon or teaching preparation, but for my own deepening of faith. I especially utilized the resource of the Moravian Daily Texts.

2. **Family Time:** An important part of my sabbatical time away was to be able to spend more time with my family. This included some trips with the girls and time away with Lisa. I was able to enjoy a true weekend in a way that a pastor’s family most times can’t. I enjoyed being able to pick up Sarah and Anna from school and

experience some of their busy after school lives involving things like piano lessons and Tae Kwan Do. I enjoyed being what I called a “Kinship Dad.” These first months of the year involved extra time away for Lisa in her role as the Chetek Kinship Director. I was able to be at home and take up the slack.

### **3. Other Sabbatical Opportunities**

- Library Work - After Lisa’s father retired from full-time ministry last year he donated a good share of his library to me. Sabbatical allowed me the time to sort through this great gift.
- Court-time with Father Gerard - An unexpected privilege was to get to know Father Gerard in a better way before he left St. Boniface in Chetek for his new parish in Medford. We spent some strenuous hours on the racquetball court taking out our frustrations! He beat me most of the time!
- Gift of time to read for



pleasure - Not only did I  
have the time to read  
professionally but I also had  
a great chance to read for  
fun, and not feel guilty  
about it!

**Closing Thoughts:** I have  
returned to Chetek Lutheran  
renewed! It feels good to be back!  
I come back with a sense of how  
important it is to maintain a  
healthy balance between church,  
family and myself. I come back  
with a renewed appreciation for  
the grace which we as Lutherans  
hold up as the life-blood of our  
relationship with God. I come  
back wanting to continue finding  
time for the daily reading of  
scripture and prayer, these “tools  
of discipleship” through which  
the Spirit brings us new life. I  
come back anxious to help shape  
opportunities for members of  
Chetek Lutheran to come together  
in small groups and grow in faith.  
**Thank you for giving me this  
opportunity! It was truly a  
grace-filled time away! A  
special thanks as well to all who  
took up additional tasks of  
ministry while I was gone.  
God’s Spirit will continue to  
blow through us all!**

