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Sabbatical Planning Update

The only guidance my parents ever gave me about my college major and career came from my mom as I was getting ready to leave for college. “Gary,” she said, “you can major in whatever interests you, but I really hope you don’t decide to prepare for the ministry.”

This advice seemed odd to me, especially since my dad was a pastor. However, as I reflected on her words, it occurred to me that my mom was trying to protect me. As a pastor’s spouse, she had witnessed first-hand the late night phone calls, the weekend weddings and funerals, and the postponed vacations because a member of the congregation was in crisis, and she hoped I would choose a career where I was not on call 24/7.

Being a pastor is demanding work, and perhaps more than most careers, it can be emotionally draining. Not to mention the pressure of having to come up with a creative and dynamic sermon every Sunday, trying to discern what message some ancient, middle Eastern text might have for the lives of 21st century Americans.

We are blessed at LOUCC to have a caring and creative pastor. Jennie works hard to plan enriching worship, direct the church staff, and support and encourage each member of our church. As church members, it’s only right that we should offer our care, encouragement, and support to her. One of the best ways to do this is provide periodic sabbaticals where Jennie can experience rest and renewal and come back refreshed for the many roles she plays among us: teacher, preacher, leader, administrator, spiritual counselor, and friend.

Our Sabbatical Planning Team (Bee Neufield, Pam Rossio, and me) have been meeting with Jennie regularly since summer to dream and discuss all things sabbatical. We’ve read a book together (“Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning”), and we’ve listened to Jennie’s hopes and dreams for her sabbatical. We’ve also talked about how our congregation can use the sabbatical period as a beneficial time for renewal as well.

Original plans were for Jennie to take her sabbatical this summer, however Jennie's pregnancy and the anticipation of a sibling for Hudson have postponed the planned sabbatical time to the following summer. This revised schedule will make it possible for us to apply for a Lilly grant, which would fund Jennie's travel, provide funds for the congregation to hire an interim pastor, and fund other congregational initiatives during the sabbatical period.

As a member of the Sabbatical Planning Team (SPT), I'm excited about the potential of this sabbatical, both for Jennie and for us. The Lilly grant material encourages the pastor to pursue "what makes her heart sing." For example, Jennie would like to include some creative activities—pottery, photography, stand-up comedy (like she needs that!)—while she's away. Wouldn't it be great if while Jennie is on sabbatical each of us individually, and our congregation corporately, also pursue something that makes our hearts sing?

Even though the date has been delayed, the grant is due this spring, so the SPT will soon be providing the congregation opportunities to brainstorm about what sabbatical might look like at LOUCC. We look forward to hearing your creative ideas, and we appreciate your prayers and support for Jennie and for our team as we put together the grant proposal.

- Gary Tandy