

SUMMER 2025

SABBATICAL REPORT

Pastor Andrew's Reflections on Travel and Growth



Sabbatical Goals

HOW TO BEGIN

The primary goal of this sabbatical was rest and health.

You don't often realize how the cumulative fatigue or tiredness can build in life. If you're like me, you might not realize it until you get sick or experience some degree of burn-out.

I am a task-oriented person in my work, and I like to see things get accomplished on personal and vocational levels. In light of this, I had never taken a break from work longer than 7-8 days since beginning full-time work in 2006. Yet, the Lord seemed fit to change that and to begin healthier rhythms for rest - not just in sabbatical or vacation, but things that could be practiced day by day, week by week, year by year.

Primary Sabbatical Activities:

- + REST
- + PERSONAL TRAINING
AND HEALTH COACHING
- + FAMILY TIME
- + TRAVEL
- + NEW EXPERIENCES



Harbor Cruise Sunset



First Beach Trip

Family Travel

FLORIDA AND FAMILY CAMP

One of the neatest parts of sabbatical was getting to plan part of it as a family. We were blessed to be able to spend a week in Florida, and to attend family camp at Riverside.

Florida: The beaches of the gulf are beautiful! They are not all the same, but they are all beautiful in their own way. We flew into Punta Gorda (thanks, cheap Allegiant flights), rented a minivan, and drove up to North Port where some wonderful and generous Immanuel people let us crash in their townhome for a week. This put us in proximity to half a dozen beaches within a thirty-minute drive.

We spent time at Nakoma Beach, Venice Beach, and North Jetty Beach (in between the first two). Since one of our core values is “clean water,” we found that North Jetty beach had the best conditions for swimming, shells, and shark teeth.

This beach also had the whiter sand which helped keep the foot-burn to a minimum. We collected many shells throughout the week!

The availability of a kitchen helped our meal planning a lot as we were able to eat most of our meals at the townhome. We did venture out for some good dining at a few places: Sharky’s on the Pier at Venice Beach, Village Brewhouse at Fishermen’s Village, and Pink Tequila’s in North Port.

Perhaps the best part of this vacation was that it had a simple plan: sleep, eat, go to the beach. We rarely felt hurried or rushed, and we have some great memories to take away from our time there!



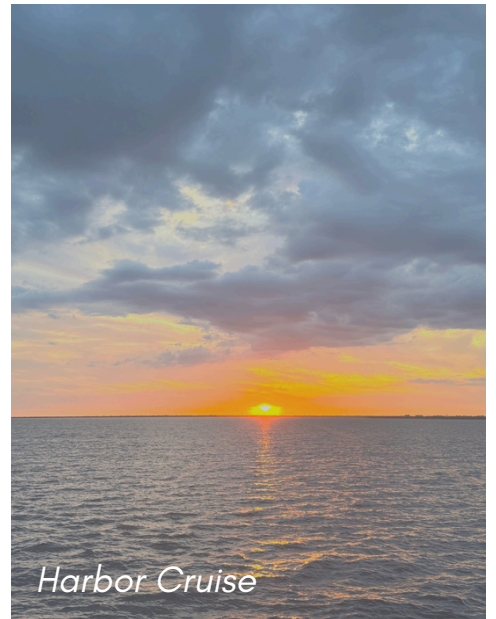
North Jetty Beach



Harbor Cruise



Evening Thunderstorm



Harbor Cruise

We went to Family Camp at Riverside too! (But oddly, I don't think we have pictures - so enjoy some more Florida pics.)

Any time that someone gets to go to Riverside, they should! Our 3-night stay at Family Camp was a great time for our family to experience Jesus together. The kids each had their own age groups for Bible Study time, and the adults got to learn from Steve Turnbull. Steve is the current chair of the Board of Trustees for LCMC, the academic Provost for the Master's Institute Seminary, and the Senior Pastor at Upper Arlington Lutheran Church in Upper Arlington, Ohio. Steve's deep knowledge of the New Testament, along with his great communications skills, provided a deep and challenging opportunity for us to grow and learn.



Sharkey's Pier



Plane Ride



Family Dinner



Lake Wabigoon



First Catch

To Canada and Back Again

DRYDEN, ONTARIO

Going to a new place is usually pretty exciting. Going to a new country was a first for me - and carried with it some anxiety. It was a blessing to have Pat, my father-in-law, take this trip with me!

As you know, the USA and Canada relations haven't been fantastic this year - and so we had some concerns about how the border crossing might go. On our second day of driving we came to International Falls. There's a pizza place called "Sammy's Pizza" that I had to stop and take a picture of, for obvious reasons, and we ate some pizza too. Afterwards, we drove to the border crossing and after about 45 seconds, we were through!

The first task in Canada was to make sure my credit card worked - so we went to a gas station and got it to work (on the second try), and then took a pitstop at Safeway to get a few groceries for our time in Canada. About 15 minutes into our time in Canada, I even received a text from Verizon welcoming me to Canada! It's incredible (and sometimes scary) how much they know about you!

From Fort Frances, we drove a couple of hours up to Dryden, Ontario. This is where some other very kind and generous Immanuel people let us crash for a couple of days before our train trip began. The drive to Dryden was pretty and quiet (and lacking cell service), and upon getting to Dryden we observed that it was a lot like many U.S. towns. Built on water, with paper milling as a main industry - they even had a Wal-Mart! Also, they had Tim Horton's, which quickly became a coffee and donut staple for my time in Canada!

At the cabin, we enjoyed some wonderful time on the lake (Wabigoon) and some great relaxation time. Part of that time was spent fishing - and I am happy to say that I caught the most fish! (Even if Julie did have the BIGGEST fish - a 31" Northern!). Walleye are fun to catch, and just as fun to eat, as we found out one evening. I learned a better way to put a minnow on the hook, and had some great success with that change.

My favorite part of the boat time was slowly trolling through an old river bed. The sun was out, the woods were lush, and we spent well over an hour bird watching as we slowly passed by. We saw loons, trumpeter swans, and a variety of other larks, hawks, and water fowl. These moments caused me to recall how blessed I was to grow up on an acreage with a pond, river, and woods. I often feel at home when those pieces of my childhood are relived!

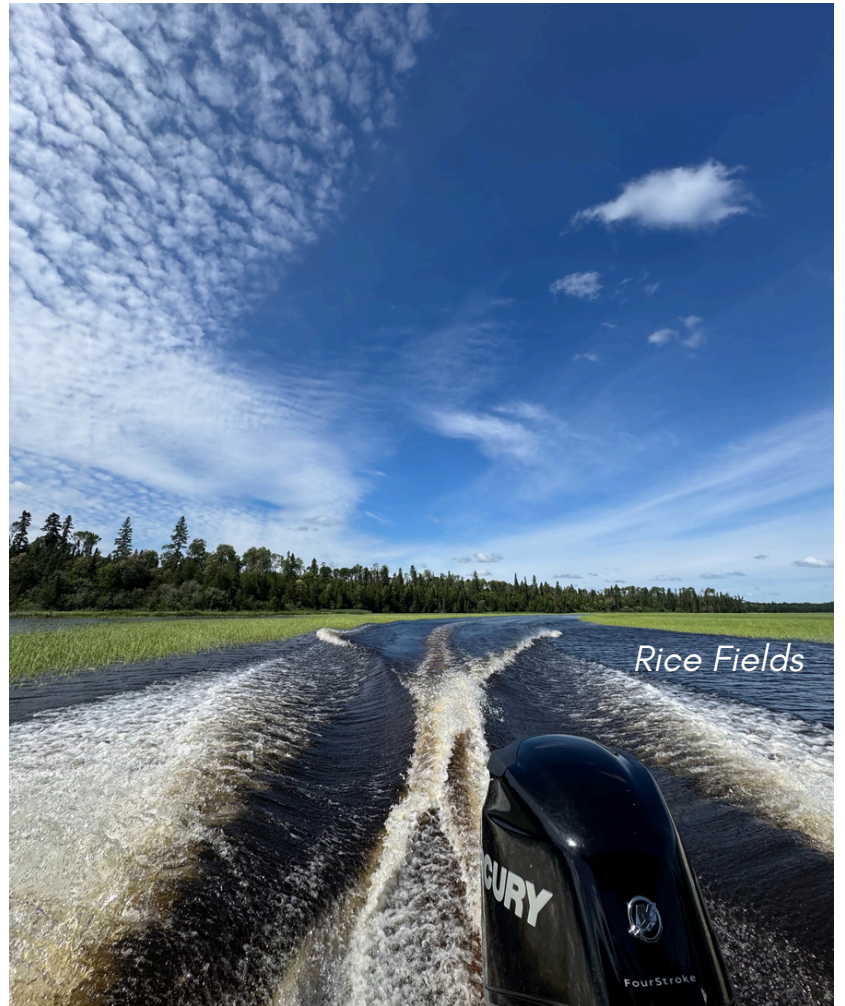
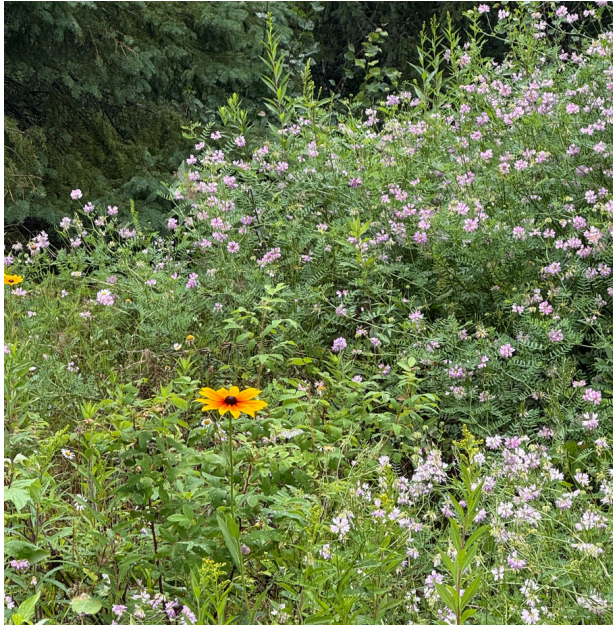
Our Dryden lake time was a wonderful experience. From the floating dock ride, to the maple creme cookies, to the bacon wrapped walleye, and the many great conversations - I have so many good memories.

To Canada and Back Again...

DRYDEN AND LAKE WABIGOON AREA



Trumpeter Swan



Rice Fields



Wabigoon Loon



Wabigoon Floating Dock Dinner



Fresh Walleye Fish Fry



VIA Rail Observation Car



Sioux Lookout Station

To Canada and Back Again...

THE VIA RAIL

After a couple of days and nights in Dryden, our hosts drove us up one morning to Sioux Lookout, Ontario. With a population of about 5,800, this is one of the “last stops” before the true wilderness of Canada begins. We saw many cargo depots and float plains which serve to connect the remote villages with the modern world.

A bit late, we watched the train come around the curve and had our opportunity to board. This was pretty informal... Most of the rail stations along this passenger line are no longer in service. The buildings have been shuttered, or repurposed like the one in Sioux Lookout. We boarded the train in economy, found some seats, and waited for our journey to begin.

To put it mildly, the economy seats were not the best choice! We thought we’d save some money on the way west, but we quickly realized that it felt more like being on an airplane than we anticipated. We had more leg room, but we still had a hard time ever getting comfortable enough to sleep! Fortunately, we still had an activity car and a “second floor” bubble top car with panoramic views. This helped to give us other options on where to spend some time.

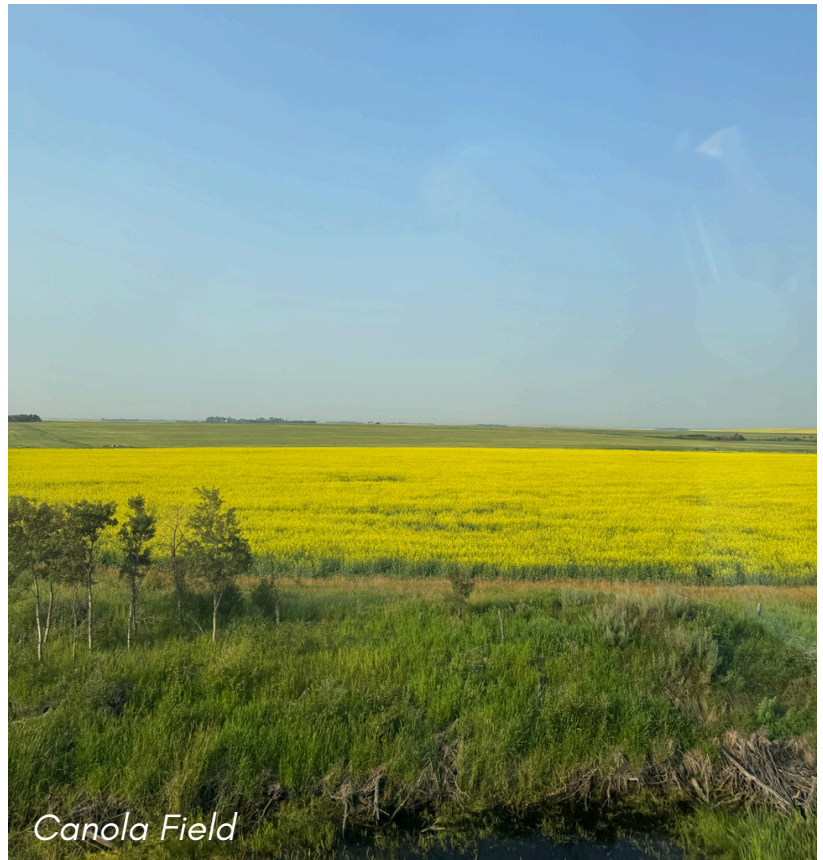
As the train headed west, we saw a lot of lakes, we experienced a lot of delays, and we eventually rolled into Winnipeg that first evening. Winnipeg had one of the “still functional” stations, and we had a chance to de-board for a while and see a small part of the historic downtown. From there, the sun began to set and we took off into the western night and into the plains of Manitoba.

I did find a few hours of sleep that first night, but it took four empty seats and a cramp in the neck to make it happen. On the bright side, we made great time overnight and found ourselves to be ahead of schedule by the time the sun came up! Now in Saskatchewan, this second day on the train consisted of miles and miles of flat croplands, grain elevators (which they call “prairie cathedrals,”), and a few brief wildlife sightings. We saw fields of rye, oats, some flax, and LOTS of yellow “canola” fields. To be honest, I appreciated the beauty of this segment of the trip just as much or more than the lakes and mountains. You can take the boy out of Iowa, but you can’t take Iowa out of the boy!

Along the route, there were a number of passengers that reached their destination or boarded at one of our many stops. My father-in-law, who is much more of a cold-turkey conversationalist than myself, was ecstatic to meet new people. Among these were a couple from the UK which gave a European opinion on the U.S. Two other interesting connections were with artists, one of which was a mildly famous native artist with a number of sculptures around Canada. We received some good travel recommendations from these conversations – specifically regarding the Banff area that we were going to.

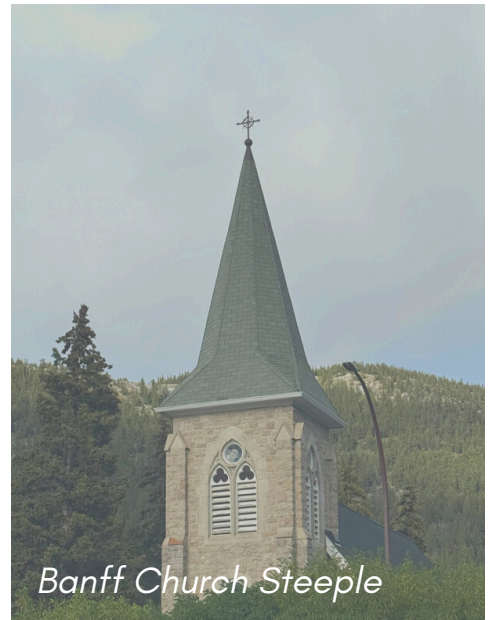
Later on that second train day, we crossed into Alberta. With that change, the scenery began to roll more, and by dinner time, we were rolling into Edmonton station. This was our time to get off – and since the rental car place closed at 5:00pm, we had to UBER to the hotel. This was my first time using UBER. Thankfully, Amir, our driver, was good to talk to and gave us some background on Edmonton. Edmonton, and much of Alberta, can be defined by two things: oil, and ranching. We arrived at our hotel for the night, and we pleasantly found an attached restaurant called “Mr. Mikes” to dine at. Our burgers were fantastic!

After a great night’s sleep, we UBERed back to the train station and picked up our rental car. From there, we headed south and drove down to Calgary, with a stop at Tim Horton’s on the way. In Calgary we stopped at Bass Pro Shops to buy some bear spray. We had major sticker-shock at how expensive many of the American goods were compared to our Altoona Bass Pro Shops location. But alas, we had to buy rain jackets somewhere, and this was our best bet.





Mountain View in Canmore, AB



Banff Church Steeple

To Canada and Back Again...

MOUNTAINS

From Calgary, we drove a couple of hours west into the mountains. I have always loved driving into the mountains and watching them grow on the horizon until you are surrounded by them. Our VRBO for the next few nights was just outside of Canmore, Alberta. We checked in, got settled, and got a few groceries for this part of our stay.

As we were arriving during peak season, it quickly became clear that we were not alone. THOUSANDS of others picked the same place at the same time, and the presence of a multitude of people defined most of our stay in the mountains. That first night, we drove over to the town of Banff to check out the visitor center and get dinner. There were many, many people. The only other experience I can relate it to would be when I visited Gatlinburg, TN back in 2021. A nice fall weekend in Gatlinburg brings 10's of thousands to the small town with one main highway. That's what Banff felt like. Population aside, we had a good dinner, and left Banff (the town) for another future trip!

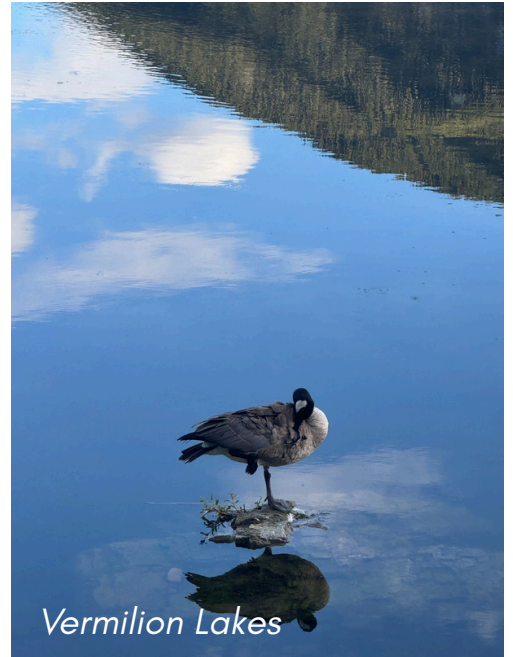
We spent a couple of days exploring the park. Outside of that first evening (the pics with the blue sky), we had little to no sun, and we had plenty of clouds, smoke, and mist to contend with. Even so, the trails we picked to hike were beautiful – even with all of the people. We also spent an afternoon on the shuttle bus visiting Lake Louise and Moraine Lake. These lakes boast the surreal turquoise blue water – which shows up just fine even in the rain! These were quick stops, but I hope to see them under blue skies someday. The rain and crowd dampened the experience a bit, but we were thankful to find some decent coffee at the Lake Louise ski lodge for our drive back to Canmore.

For our leisure time and meals, we spent our time in Canmore. Canmore feels a lot like Estes Park, and we found the dining and shops there to be much of what we hoped for a Canadian mountain town! We perused a half dozen photography and art galleries, and had a few good meals. My favorite meal was in a German restaurant called “Das Schnitzelhaus.” You guessed it, I had schnitzel! My German DNA was happy. Canmore was also less crowded, and had less traffic in the downtown area, so I'd recommend this town for those busier times of year in the Canadian Rockies.

After three nights in the mountains, it was time to pack up and drive back to Edmonton. The drive was more clouds and more rain, but we ended up back at the train station with plenty of time to spare. I ordered my first UBER Eats of my lifetime, and had some great local pizza before we boarded the train.

To Canada and Back Again...

TOWN OF BANFF AND VERMILION LAKES



To Canada and Back Again...

JOHNSON LAKE AND LAKE MINNEWANKA



Johnson Lake



Johnson Lake



Johnson Lake Area



Johnson Lake Area



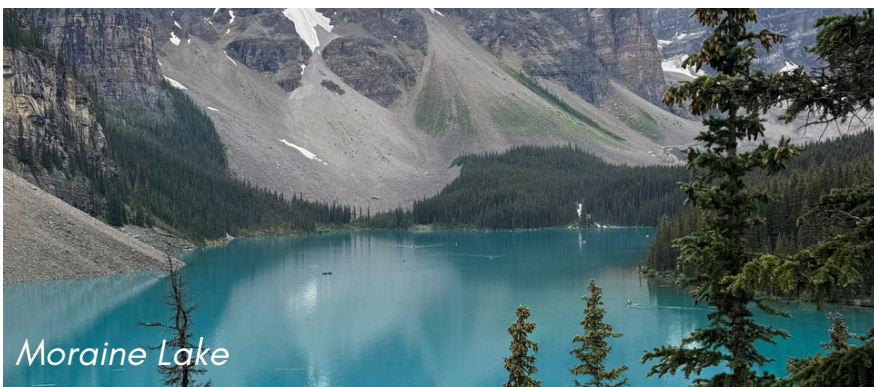
Lake Minnewanka



Lake Minnewanka

To Canada and Back Again...

JOHNSTON FALLS, LAKE LOUISE, AND MORaine LAKE



To Canada and Back Again...

JOHNSTON FALLS, LAKE LOUISE, AND MORaine LAKE

Johnston Canyon



Johnston Canyon Falls, AB



Johnston Canyon, AB



Johnston Canyon, AB



Johnston Canyon, AB



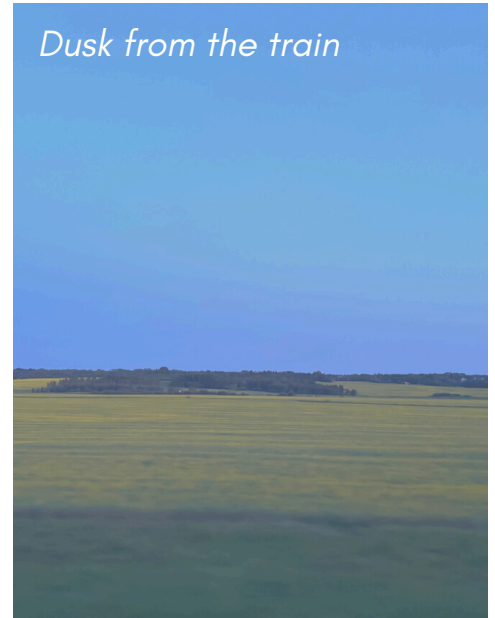
Johnston Canyon, AB



Mountain Hike



Edmonton Skyline



Dusk from the train

To Canada and Back Again...

BACK EAST

As we boarded the VIA rail, this time we had tickets in the sleeper class!!! We were greeted by ACTUAL BEDS in our car, and I could *almost* stretch all the way out while laying down. My upper bunk was comfortable, and these "berth" cars had curtains for our beds, better restrooms, and even showers available. For this return trip, we had two nights on the train, so I quickly became thankful for the bed!

In all sleeper class situations, the meals are included. So, for the return trip, we were treated to three hot meals on our full day heading east. I enjoyed a fresh omelet for breakfast, seafood penne for lunch, and prime rib for dinner. Like I said, not a bad upgrade! If you ever ride on the VIA Rail overnight, remember this! We also had the same options of hanging out in the activity car and utilizing the panoramic views of the bubble car.

On the train, we had a few good conversations at meals with people from other parts of the United States. One couple was from New Mexico, and the other was from California. The latter were avid travelers and gave us some good pointers on other scenic train trips in North America! One interesting fact: most of the train riders (both ways) were Canadian or European. We saw very few United States license plates in Canada, and met even fewer Americans along the way. Most of the tourists along our route seemed to be from Europe and Eastern Asia.



Saskatchewan barns from train

After our second night on the train, our Dryden hosts picked us up from the train station in Sioux Lookout in the early morning. We drove back down to Dryden, picked up our car, and decided to make the trek all the way back to Story City. (After some more Tim Horton's, of course!). Our boarder crossing was painless, and we experienced a smooth drive back down through Minnesota and into Iowa.

All in all, this Canada trip had many firsts for me - and I look forward to sharing some of these experience and new places with Allison and my family in the future!

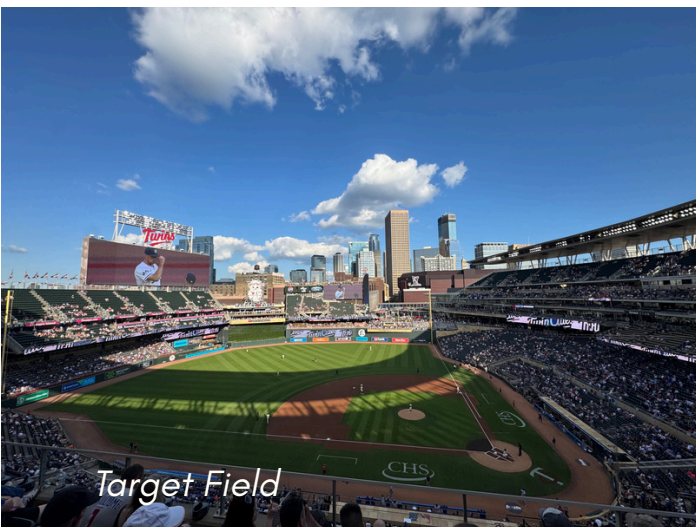
*Twin Lakes**St. Croix River at Stillwater*

Other Travels

I had a few other shorter trips on my Sabbatical time. I began Sabbatical with a 48-hr Silent Retreat up at Twin Lakes. Later in June, I spent a few nights up in Minneapolis with the LCMC boards, staff, and district leaders. It was a great time to hear from our new Service Coordinator, Julie Smith, and to have great fellowship with some of the many good people that God has blessed our Association with. On the front end of this meetings trip, I got to spend some time on a boat on the beautiful St. Croix river by Stillwater, MN. I also went to my first Twins game at Target Field.

Towards the end of Sabbatical, I made my fourth annual trip up to Twin Pines resort on the west shore of Lake Mille Lacs. Edgar, Ben, and myself had 12 hours of boat fishing, and although the fish didn't cooperate too much, we still had a good trip. We only got soaked by a pop-up severe thunderstorm once!

Finally, I had the chance to do a few other activities. I took our kids to the Blank Park Zoo one day, and we had a blast. On another weekend I was able to attend my cousin's wedding up in Waterloo, IA. While I was up there, I took a short stroll to the Potratz Natural Area – the conservation area that used to be the acreage where I grew up. I like to visit there at least once a year.

*Target Field**Blank Park Zoo*



Potratz Natural Area - Black Hawk County



*Hilltop on Bremer/
Butler county line*

Reflections on Sabbath

Sabbatical for a pastor is all about rest. In the academic world, there are usually requirements tied to continuing ed, research, and career or institutional advancement. For the pastor, sabbatical is about laying down the vocation of the pastor for a season to rest and remember the other things that God calls us to. Before I was ever “pastor,” I was Andrew. Then husband, father, and friend to many. For many of our lives, we feel stretched and pulled between the work that we do and who we are. This sabbatical, in reflection, allowed me to focus on who I am for my family, and who I am in the eyes of Jesus: a beloved child of God. This is my first and foremost identity. It is who I am even when I am (or am not) pastor.

Sabbaticals are also healthy for other reasons. As a pastor, there is often a temptation to become indispensable to a church. For many prideful reasons, pastors like the attention. They like to feel wanted and appreciated week in and week out. I certainly like to feel wanted and appreciated, but I never want Immanuel’s Mission to be disproportionately on my shoulders. I truly believe that a healthy pastor will work themselves out of many different roles over their time at a congregation because OTHERS in the body of Christ are being trained and equipped to “be the Church” as Jesus intends. My absence for 12 weeks was healthy for my own outlook and priorities, and it was healthy for the church to see others step up and use their developing gifts!

Finally, my sabbath journey helped me to rest. It’s really that simple. For years and years of serving in ministry, I didn’t know how my “tank” was being slowly depleted after time. Since graduating college, I have worked for five different ministries. I got married young, and due to ever-changing circumstances, we have lived in three different rentals and owned five different houses - all before our move (back) to Story City. Rarely was a true “vacation” taken and never was there any sort of leave that mirrored the journey of a sabbatical. After Covid and the rapidly changing culture and church, this sabbatical allowed me time to reflect, rest, and look in the mirror. God has been good and faithful at every turn - and I still have much to learn about how to rest in a way that honors God, my family, and myself.

The processing continues as I have returned to my desk at Immanuel. There was no “easing” back into my role here - but thankfully, it is obvious that the Lord provided much rest and recharging for me over the sabbatical journey. I have more creative energy, more gratitude, and have a refined sense of priorities now than before I left. I am blessed to be here at Immanuel, and I cannot imagine calling anything other than Story City “home” at this point in life.

Thank you for this opportunity, for your investment in me (and Allison), and for continuing to call me pastor and friend!

A Few More Sabbatical Pictures...

STORY CITY AREA



Raspberries from my garden



Jo at Riverside



Sheep Shearing at
the Hansen Farm



Greenbelt Meadow



Annabelle in the summer play



Riverside Family Camp