



KAIROS

moments

Reflections and Resources for the Journey



SPARK A KAIROS MOMENT

*Be still and know
that I am God.*

Psalm 46:10

*The adventure
of visioning and
transformation
becomes exciting
when it springs from
faith that refreshed
and energized in a
season of Jubilee.*

*Before a major
journey of discovery,
challenge yourself:
“Do we have the
courage to first be
still—the discipline
that comes before
knowing?” You’ll
create the sacred
space that allows
God to speak*

ON SABBATH, SABBATICAL AND LISTENING IN THE SACRED SPACE

“What is wanting to happen?” “What is waiting to speak?”

These simple questions can inspire life-enriching journeys for congregations and their leaders. Yet, when Kairos first poses them, the response can be silence: a silence of God’s people overwhelmed with relentless demands and endless activities.

Raw silence can be transformed into rich renewal by embracing the gifts of Sabbath and Jubilee—intentional ceasing that forms rich soil for what is to become.

Drawing on the wisdom of the Kairos community, we asked Genelle Netland, Senior Pastor of Calvary Lutheran in Bemidji, and David Schreiber, Lead Pastor of Resurrection Lutheran in Indianapolis, to share what they’ve discovered about the transformative value of sabbatical.

Their insights offer glimpses into holy time where we can seek vision, shape ministry, refresh vocation and strengthen relationships.

FINDING RHYTHMS THAT REFRESH AND RENEW

“Sabbatical is a time apart that’s not meant to ‘get away from something’ but to ‘move towards something,’” says Pastor David Schreiber of Resurrection Lutheran. Quoting the Rev. Bill Brosend, the former Associate Director of the Louisville Institute, he adds, “Sabbatical is not about avoidance or escape, but encounter and embrace.”

Schreiber has experienced several sabbaticals during his time at Resurrection Lutheran, a dynamic and growing urban church.

His first sabbatical—spent somewhat guiltily on projects designed to prove the time’s worth—was a period where Schreiber never quite fully disengaged. Yet through it, the people of Resurrection learned important lessons: the congregation did not fall apart in their lead pastor’s absence; they, indeed, were the church, and a perfectly gifted priesthood of believers; and Schreiber was visibly rested and refreshed for ministry. That process prepared both Schreiber and Resurrection to fully embrace sequential sabbaticals for all the staff.

ON SABBATH, SABBATICAL, AND LISTENING... *continued*

In his next sabbatical, Schreiber was better equipped to create a holy experience that engaged in something new. Here, he combined his passion for drama and film with dinner-table dreams of travelling with family. Inspired by the book, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly* by Marva Dawn, Schreiber framed his sabbatical proposal to the Lilly Foundation in cycles of Ceasing, Rest, Embrace and Feast, a rhythm of living that naturally fit the understanding of Biblical Jubilee. When the sabbatical was granted, Schreiber bookended the sabbaticals at the beginning and end with silent retreat and prayer, a holy stillness that he recommends for any pastor considering the sabbatical process. He returned, alive with new possibilities of liturgical drama and film as tools of proclamation.

During the journey apart, the congregation of Resurrection used the time to prepare for and explore how to intentionally use the church's new projection screen and media system. When pastor and parish came back together, there was a whole new vision empowering expanded, media-rich encounters for teaching, preaching and communication.

His second sabbatical also inspired Schreiber to more mindfully bring the rhythms of Sabbath into daily pastoral life. Finding the notion of balance a myth in his own life, he continues to incorporate the ancient cadence of Cease, Rest, Embrace and Feast to celebrate Sabbath in a pressured, postmodern world.

"I WAS THE PROBLEM"

Nearly a decade ago, Calvary Lutheran, a Bemidji, MN, congregation, lived through a painful time of pastoral turnover. Looking deep within, the congregation instituted clergy sabbaticals as an intentional, Biblical way to care for its pastors. For members of Calvary, sabbatical was not merely a promised perk; it was an integral part of their pastor's call.

Yet despite the support of the congregation and the arrival of a new associate, Pastor Genelle Netland discovered a horrifying truth when it came time for her own sabbatical. Her own internal expectations held her back from enjoying meaningful renewal.

"I was the problem," admits Genelle. Only by giving herself permission to let go was she able to wholeheartedly pursue her sabbatical: a quest to find ways to balance and integrate her roles of pastoral leader, wife, mother and daughter. As she drew closer to God, she says, God prepared the way with amazing people, unexpected God-moments and compelling connections.

Emerging reinvigorated, Netland finds she is more able to be truly present for her family and congregation. "I now love who I am," she says. "I walk daily with the God of abundance, laughter and life-giving Gospel."

She also finds deep meaning in modeling more faithful, balanced living, making healthy changes that resonate in how we are church and family very visible ways. She has stopped working most nights, enjoys worshipping with her family as part of the congregation and finishes the day in the company of her children, who come to the church office after school. In the midst of this natural flow, Calvary's ministry flourishes. "I don't have to compartmentalize anymore," she explains.

Calvary and Netland have experienced the reality that sabbatical blesses both pastor and congregation, creating time when new ministries are imagined and gifts discovered. Through it, Calvary has bonded closely with their new associate; become even more open to change and opportunity; and embraces the commitment to ongoing, planned sabbaticals as a critical element of pastor-care.

WHAT'S THE VALUE OF SABBATICAL?

In 2008, the Louisville Institute, a source for sabbatical grants endowed by the Lilly Foundation, surveyed all the pastoral leaders who received grants, along with a representative member of the congregations they served. Nearly half of 500 grant recipients and 40% of congregations returned the survey. Findings included:

- 87% percent of pastors reported that their sabbatical significantly renewed their commitment to ministry.
- 94% of congregational representatives perceived their pastor to have been refreshed or re-energized after the sabbatical.
- 75% of congregations report that the sabbatical tangibly benefited the life of the church.
- In narrative responses, a number of pastors reported new ministries resulting from their sabbatical experience.
- Solid majorities reported that the sabbatical had a positive impact on congregational attitudes to pastoral sabbaticals, mobilized a continuing increase in lay involvement in church leadership and generated a discernible increase in the overall enthusiasm for ministry among congregation members.

RESOURCES

Books

Richard Bullock & Richard Bruesehoff. *Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning*. (Alban Institute 2000)

Melissa Sevier. *Journeying Toward Renewal*. (Alban Institute 2002)

Marva Dawn. *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting*. (Eerdmans 1999)

Articles

Articles on clergy sabbaticals are found on this Lilly Endowment-sponsored page:

<http://www.resourcingchristianity.org/overview-resources/articles/clergy-sabbaticals>

Funding for Clergy Sabbatical

Lilly Clergy Renewal Program. <http://www.cpx.cts.edu/renewal>

Louisville Institute. <http://www.louisville-institute.org/Grants/programs.aspx>