

Steve Thulson's 2017 Sabbatical Report to CCC Sabbatical Team and Council October 6, 2017

I have been blessed beyond measure with the gift of another Sabbatical from my pastoral responsibilities, July 1 – October 7, 2017. The Elders graciously extended the three months to compensate for my investing pastoral time for John Larson's memorial service and the weddings of Nikki and Greg, Jenica and Chris, and Lindsay and Chris.

CCC's Sabbatical Policy includes this requirement:

Upon returning from sabbatical leave, the pastor will create a written summary of his or her leave and what direction God provided during this time. Upon his or her return, the pastor will meet with the Church Council to discuss and determine what steps, if any, may be necessary to respond to God's leading.

This is my summary, provided first to my very helpful Sabbatical Team: Steve Logan (team leader and "Sabbatical mentor"), Myrna Beblavi, and Adam Wilson. During the Sabbatical, I met with the Team twice, and with Steve a couple more times to check in and gain their insights.

For the Congregation, my Sabbatical Proposal had this Focus:

- *For CCC to prepare for carrying out its fresh direction discerned in early-mid 2017, and give attention to personal transitions in stages of life and faith within our intentionally inter-generational church.*

That held the following Desired Outcomes:

- *Congregation receive encouragement and equipping for God's redemptive work in life's transitions in various seasons and stages (e.g. faith, marriage, work) within relationships across different generations (e.g. Millennials, Gen X, Boomers, Builders).*
- *Elders move toward clarity on best process and timing for Lead Pastor transition in light of CCC's overall direction discerned in early-mid 2017.*
- *Karl Helvig's gifts for prospective Lead Pastor ministry somewhere exercised and so clarified and strengthened.*

I sense this has been a fruitful season for CCC, but I'll let the Elders and others make that evaluation, and concentrate here on my own experience, relative to the following Sabbatical proposals.

Focus:

- *For Steve to let God prepare him for his next season of life and ministry that he might "flourish in the courts of our God" and "still bear fruit in old age" (Psalm 92:13-14), making written reflections on the meaning of "calling" and "vocation," both for himself and for others he shepherds.*

Desired Outcomes:

- *Rest in body, mind and spirit through obligation-free and life-giving activities.*
- *Identify core priorities and related life disciples to be sustained and developed for optimizing both the gifts and limits of aging (e.g. learning "pace of grace," grieving losses redemptively, repurposing passions, routines), seeking wisdom from others – especially Pastors who are 5-15 years older.*
- *Personal identity in Christ newly clarified, and fresh calls for serving him (within and/or beyond CCC) in post-Sabbatical season discerned, so can focus work in "sweet spots" of unique and strongest gifts, as well as help others identify their calls from God.*
- *Marital bond with Darlene renewed, including consideration of what forms it might take after 45 years together, both in direct relationship and in life with children and grandchildren.*

I can honestly say that the primary purpose and desired outcomes of the Sabbatical were fulfilled. I experienced significant rest and renewal, the blessing of extra time with Darlene and our family, at least glimpses of how God might provide grace for the final season of life, and deep peace of heart and even some clarity of mind on my ministry callings for the years ahead.

Here are the proposed Sabbatical “activities” and how they actually played out.

1. *Solitude and silence with God for listening and reflecting: 8 day Ignatian Retreat at Sacred Heart, August 14-23.*

An extraordinary time with God in his Word, on lots of walks/hikes, daily worship in 30 minute Masses and 45 minute conversations with Father Ed Kinerk, being still in silence, and 46 pages of journal prayer/reflections. If my biggest question for God was “What do I DO in the next season of life?” his biggest question was “Let’s look at who you ARE now.” Typical. Sometimes hard, but very good. Though the priority was more my heart and identity with Jesus, he did lead me into some peace and fairly specific leading on “what’s next.”

2. *Consistent exercise, balanced diet and life-giving reading to maintain health.*

- Along with some walks and a few mountain hikes, I rode over 500 miles on 25 bike rides.
- I’m not sure my diet was very “balanced,” but at least I didn’t gain weight!
- I enjoyed lots of great reading (* = most significant):
 - Sabbatical Focus: *Stevens, Aging Matters: Finding Your Calling for the Rest of Your Life; *Chittister, The Gift of Years: Growing Old Gracefully; *Garber, Visions of Vocation; Guinness, the Call; *Palmer, Let Your Life Speak; Bergstrom, Third Calling; Carter, Virtues of Aging; Benson, Echo Within; Cron, Road Back to You.
 - Faith/Life: *Warren, Liturgy of Ordinary; *Nouwen, Making All Things New; Merton, Seeds of Contemplation; Brother Lawrence, Practice of Presence; Alexander, Playbook.
 - Theology/Ministry: Ryrie, Protestantism; *Boyd, Cross Vision.
 - History/Culture/Literature: *Snyder, On Tyranny; Harari, Sapiens; Harari, Homo Deus; Rilke, Letters to Young Poet.
 - Biography, Marshall, Bob Dylan – a Spiritual Life; Gushee, Still Christian.
 - Fiction: *Karon, Come Rain, Come Shine; Grisham, Camino Island; Lewis, Perelandra; Lewis, Magicians Nephew; Alexander, Crossover; Runcie, Persistence of Love.

3. *Reflection, journaling and reading related to Sabbatical themes of vocation, life seasons, aging.*
This is reflected in #1 and #2 above.

4. *Conversations with few older Pastors and others about transitions into life and ministry beyond age 66.*
I had helpful conversations with the following at least semi-retired Pastors: John Martz, Chuck Orwiler, Tom Ashbrook, and Alan Eastling. I hope to have dialogue with a few others, perhaps Art Greco, Wes Swanson, and Rock Doddridge.

5. *Meet with Sabbatical Team (and perhaps a few others) for a prayerful conversation on a) What are Steve’s most impactful gifts for CCC’s health and mission in the future? And b) What might faithfulness for Steve look like apart from CCC?*

The late August meeting with the Team, along with Darlene, was extremely encouraging. Steve Logan led us into conversation about several Scriptures, including the text of my last sermon before the Sabbatical: “to each is give a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” That led to some discussion about the idea of retirement, how the Spirit manifests himself in me for the common good – in the past and perhaps in the future, how CCC is being called in its mission, and how God might be calling me to serve whether in or outside CCC. There was an emphasis on ways I develop people for growth and leadership through encouragement, teaching and mentoring.

Darlene and I also met with the Team September 28 to review a draft of this report as well as the sense we have of God's direction for future ministry. Again, we received much encouragement and significant wisdom from Steve, Myrna and Adam.

6. *At least one week with Darlene at west coast.*

We loved 10 days of mostly "beach time" in Laguna Beach, CA, that included 4 days with Laura and Jayden at both Disneyland and the ocean, and then a day with our "amigos" from CHET in L.A. getting caught up after our Kenya missions. For renewal, Darlene and I had long walks and good food. And I sort of body-surfed most days!

7. *Mountain trips with Darlene and family.*

We took 4 short mountain trips, mostly in Rocky Mountain National Park and Estes Park where I officiated at Jenica Gammie's wedding and participated in the Covenant Height's closing day.

8. *2-3 counseling sessions with Harv Powers.*

With the times I had with wise folks like the Sabbatical Team, Father Ed and other Pastors, I did not feel the need for sessions with Harv. However, I may try to see him in the next several months as the vocational discernment process continues.

9. *Worship with a variety of congregations.*

Darlene and I were blessed to worship with Castle Oaks Covenant, Littleton Wellspring Anglican, Renovate Covenant, as well as watching several live stream CCC worship gatherings.

10. *Be available to Mom to help with possible housing transition.*

There were no significant developments in her transition plans, though I had more time than usual simply to be with her along with other family members.

Sabbatical expenses of \$7,000 from the Sabbatical Fund were very close to what was planned:

• Travel	\$1,565
• Lodging	\$4,189
• Meals	\$909
• Books	\$57
• <u>Other</u>	<u>\$280</u>
TOTAL	\$7,000

Details have been submitted to Pastor Ron Mol and Treasurer Jay Smith, and are available to the Council and Sabbatical Team.