

Sabbatical Plan 2020 - Rev. Bruce McAndless-Davis

Purpose of Sabbaticals:

The essence of a sabbatical is rooted in the biblical practice of the Sabbath Day described in the Bible. It is an intentional practice of rest from work to allow for renewal in mind, body and spirit.

The United Church of Canada policy requires every community of faith to provide a paid sabbatical of at least three months to members of the order of ministry who have completed at least five years of service in one call or appointment. Sabbatical leave is over and above annual study leave for continuing education, or vacation time.

The following excerpts are reminders of the purpose and benefits of a sabbatical:

Sabbatical time is for learning through reflection, revitalization, and recreation. It is, therefore, personal and individual in nature. It may include study, spiritual retreat, and rest and will probably be a blend of all of these.

When ministry personnel take a sabbatical, communities of faith benefit from the opportunity to reflect on their mission and ministry and experience different gifts of lay leadership. The sabbatical offers the community of faith a minister who returns with new energy and clarity about the tasks at hand.

Pastoral Relations: Supporting the Pastoral Relationship, United Church of Canada 2019

Period of Absence: May 14 – October 1 (3 months sabbatical, 3 weeks study leave, 4 weeks vacation)

The intention is to take the sabbatical during the summer months when it would be less disruptive to the ministries and programs of Peninsula United Church. As shown on the attached schedule, some study leave and annual vacation from both 2019/20 and 2020/21 have been combined with the sabbatical. This approach provides a longer period for rest and work on personal goals.

Sabbatical Theme: Learning the “Unforced Rhythms of Grace”

*Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me— watch how I do it. **Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.** I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.*

Matthew 11:28-30 *The Message*

Personal Sabbatical Goals:

1. Rest deeply, play, and restore my mental, physical and spiritual health.
2. Be renewed in my spiritual life and learn/re-learn the “unforced rhythms of grace” by establishing new daily and weekly practices that will continue and endure after the sabbatical.
3. Explore and deepen my understanding of the Celtic Christian tradition, its foundations and practices.
4. Reflect on my practice of ministry from the wide-angle perspective that is only possible when not engaged in it.

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Plans & Strategies:

1. Rest

Much of my sabbatical time will be spent with my Father in Nova Scotia, and visiting friends and family in the Maritimes and Ontario. I will reconnect with important relations, be present with my father, play lots of tennis, swim and enjoy a generous break from the stresses of our busy ministries. I also plan to establish healthier patterns of sleep, eating and daily exercise.

Desired outcome:

Establish healthy lifestyle practices regarding exercise, eating, and sleeping that endure after the sabbatical ends.

2. Renewing the “Unforced Rhythms of Grace”

Practices I will explore and seek to establish include daily time for prayer, meditation, reading, journaling, making music, walking and other exercise. Studies have observed that new behavioural patterns commonly take more than two months to become well established. (Lally et al., 2009) I will be using the materials from the Medical Weight Management program I’m engaged in, and other resources from previous retreats, courses and consultations with my Spiritual Director to help me establish some new rhythms in my life. My Director, my father (who is a trusted mentor), and my Spouse will help me to be accountable and encourage my growth.

Desired outcome:

Renewed personal spiritual practices based on a period of exploration and reflection.

3. Celtic Christianity

My initial hopes of travelling to the UK and experience intentional communities on Iona, Lindisfarne, etc. are not possible due to financial constraints. So I have developed an alternate plan to study with John Philip Newell, a foremost authority on the Celtic tradition. He established the *School of Celtic Consciousness* (SCC) in the belief that Celtic wisdom is urgently needed at this moment in time.

The goals of the SCC are:

1. To consciously access the wisdom of our Celtic Christian inheritance.
2. To deepen spiritual practice in relationship to this wisdom.
3. To translate this study and practice into compassionate action.

The SCC provides a study program based on three units:

Unit 1 - ‘In the Beginning was the Gift’ (Pelagius, St Brigid, and Teilhard de Chardin).

Unit 2 - ‘The Song of the Sacred Earth’ (Eriugena, the Carmina Gadelica, and John Muir).

Unit 3 - ‘Dreaming the Way Forward’ (Alexander Scott, Kenneth White, and George MacLeod).

Texts: *Listening for the Heartbeat of God*, *The Book of Creation* and *Christ of the Celts*.

My application to the SCC was accepted and I have attended a course on the first unit in February, 2020 near San Francisco.

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I will attend the Unit 3 course in July, 2020 at Five Oaks Centre in Ontario, when I will be in Ontario for family events. The study units do not need to be taken in order, and I plan to attend the Unit 2 course in 2021.

In my application, I explained my interest in the Celtic Christian tradition as follows:

The Celtic Christian tradition has resonated deeply with me for many years and I have made frequent use of various Celtic sources (prayers, music, etc.), including John Philip Newell's work, in the faith communities with which I work. My experience is that this tradition is an important antidote to a colonialist Christian tradition because it nurtures a deep connectedness to the earth, it uses the senses and a more incarnational/embodyed approach to spiritual practice, and it focuses on deepening spiritual practice alongside thoughtful theological reflection.

My experience is that Celtic spiritual practices often resonate with people on the margins of the church, and folks who are suspicious of Western Christian traditions. The material I've read and the one course I attended (with Lorie Martin, a graduate of the School) have left me hungering for more. I believe becoming more immersed in this tradition will bring me life and also help me to share that life-giving tradition with others with whom I minister.

Desired outcome:

Sharing of knowledge and personal experience of the Celtic Christian tradition through sermons, study groups, and other means with members of Peninsula United Church and the local community.

4. Reflect on Personal Ministry:

It will be a particular privilege to gain new perspective on my work through the gift of this Sabbath time. Many of the activities outlined above will offer opportunities to reflect more deeply on my ministry with Peninsula United Church, as I open myself daily to the Spirit's leading.

I anticipate important and meaningful reflection and discussion with my fellow participants at the two Celtic School events, some of whom will be ministry personnel from different contexts and traditions. I will stay in touch with my Spiritual Director and appreciate the wise support of my father and Karen. I also hope to spend a week at Naramata Centre in August.

Desired outcome:

Current review of personal gifts and call to ministry that form the basis of renewed career goals, self-assessment of performance, and personal learning plans.

Re-Establishing Pastoral Relations:

Changes will occur during my 4-month absence from Peninsula United Church. I hope and trust that this sabbatical will be a gift of exploration and renewal for both the leadership of this community of faith and for me.

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We will be in a different time and place in our journey together and there will be a need to share and learn about our experiences during the sabbatical and to re-establish pastoral relationships.

While it is difficult to predict what changes may occur, it is my intention to take the following approach on my return from the sabbatical:

1. Leadership
Report to the leadership of Peninsula United Church on activities undertaken, the achievement of the desired outcomes, and personal hopes for the future.
2. Team Ministry
Listen to the hopes and concerns of my partner in ministry, the Rev. Janice Young, and discuss ways in which I can renew and strengthen our team ministry.
3. Situation Scan
Meet with ministry and program leaders in the first month of my return to learn of recent activities and current needs.
4. Personal Action Plan
Develop work goals and objectives for the next 6 months based on information from this engagement with the leadership of Peninsula United Church and from the learning and personal growth resulting from my sabbatical.