

## SABBATICAL PROPOSAL

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According to the *Oxford American Dictionary*, the word “sabbatical” is an adjective that means “of or like the Sabbath.” It goes on to define “sabbatical leave” as “leave granted at (often seven-year) intervals to a university professor etc. for study and travel.” The etymology of “sabbatical” suggests that it also has to do with rest; it is derived from the Hebrew word *shabbat*, which is translated “Sabbath” and means “rest.” With these understandings in mind, I have crafted a sabbatical proposal that balances study, travel, and rest. It also balances time spent with my wife and children, time spent with my wife alone, and time spent by myself.

More specifically, my plan is to travel for approximately one week out of every three over a three-month period (August 13 through November 14 of 2010, a span that includes thirteen weeks and fourteen Sundays). The trips would combine study and recreation, which would provide me with the opportunity to re-create in two different ways. I hope to travel with my wife and children for parts of two of the trips, to travel with my wife alone on one trip, and to travel by myself on one trip. During the periods between and after the four trips, I would remain home, writing up the qualitative research done during my travel, reading relevant literature to supplement my observations, and resting.

The thematic canopy over my sabbatical leave would be missional worship. I have been engaged in the missional conversation for a number of years, and I have brought Trinity Presbyterian Church into this conversation. To this point, the conversation has been focused more on theory than on practice. When missional practices have been explored, they have focused mostly on the important work of engaging neighborhoods. But what about corporate worship? Does the missional conversation have anything to say about this subject? True, a missional church will be incarnational rather than attractational—its primary goal is to empower people to be and to do church wherever they are, not to attract people to a church building (whether for corporate worship or anything else). Still, the people of missional churches do gather together to worship God. What characterizes their worship? Where do they worship? When do they worship? How do they worship? What do these and other characteristics of their worship gatherings convey about their understanding of God and God’s mission? How do their worship gatherings empower participants to partner in this mission?

I hope to seek answers to these questions and more by worshiping with numerous missional churches around the country. Through books, blogs, personal contacts, and word of mouth, I have identified a number of churches that exhibit missional tendencies. These Christian communities (an ecumenical mix) are located in four different regions of the U.S. By visiting churches in different parts of the country, I would have an opportunity to observe how the gospel is contextualized in and for different American subcultures. Intentional contextualization is one of the main features of missional churches. Theologian John Franke puts it like this: “[The missional church] is a particular kind of community, namely, a missional community in keeping with the missional character of God. That this calling is carried out around the world in numerous and divergent social, historical, and cultural settings means that the precise contours and iterations of this missional vocation are reflected in a variety of

ways that share a family resemblance.” In what “variety of ways” is worship practiced by missional churches in various contexts? What do these ways have in common—what is their “family resemblance”? The research imagined (which would include exegetical walking of the neighborhoods around the worship locations) would allow me to draw some provisional conclusions about these things.

It is also my hope that this research would benefit Trinity—and perhaps even the larger church. I envision writing up my observations in the form of a theological travelogue that will include descriptions of my many worship experiences. This written work may prove to be a helpful resource for those persons—program staff and laity—who imagine and implement Trinity’s worship services. Certainly, I expect that it will refresh and expand my own imagination for worship, both its planning and its practice; and this re-creation is likely to make me a more creative worship leader—a worthwhile goal given the fact that the object of our worship is the creator of all things.

Below is an itinerary for the sabbatical leave described (note: I will be worshipping at additional missional churches in California—including Vintage Faith Church [Santa Cruz], University Presbyterian Church [Fresno], and North Fresno Mennonite Brethren Church, and Grace Fellowship Community Church [San Francisco]—on some open Sundays).

### **Leg One: Northwest**

August 13-14: Drive with wife and children to Portland

August 15: Worship at St. Luke Lutheran Church; worship at the Evergreen Community; walk neighborhoods

August 16: Drive to Seattle

August 17-20: Visit extended family

August 21: Worship at Quest Church; walk neighborhood

August 22: Worship at Vineyard Community Church; worship at Church of the Apostles; walk neighborhoods

August 23-24: Drive home

August 25-September 3: Write up research, read, rest

### **Leg Two: Midwest**

September 4: Fly to Chicago

September 5: Worship at Life on the Vine; worship at Holy Trinity Church; walk neighborhoods

September 6-8: Explore Chicago and Milwaukee

September 9: Drive to Minneapolis-St. Paul

September 10: Explore Minneapolis-St. Paul

September 11: Worship at Missio Dei; walk neighborhood

September 12: Worship at Woodland Hills Church; worship at Solomon's Porch; walk neighborhoods; drive to Chicago

September 13: Drive to Chicago; fly home

September 14-23: Write up research, read, rest

### **Leg Three: California**

September 24: Drive to Los Angeles

September 25: Worship at Kaleo; walk neighborhood

September 26: Worship at Mountainside Communion; walk neighborhood

September 27: Drive home

September 28-29: Write up research, read, rest

September 30: Drive with wife and children to Los Angeles

October 1: Explore Los Angeles

October 2: Worship at Hollywood Adventist Church; walk neighborhood

October 3: Worship at United Presbyterian Church; worship at Kairos Hollywood; walk neighborhoods

October 4: Drive home

October 5-15: Write up research, read, rest

### **Leg Four: Northeast**

October 16: Fly with wife to Pittsburgh

October 17: Worship at Hot Metal Bridge; worship at the Open Door; walk neighborhoods

October 18: Drive to New York City

October 19-20: Explore New York City

October 21: Drive to Philadelphia

October 22: Explore Philadelphia

October 23: Worship at Mission Fellowship; walk neighborhood

October 24: Worship at the Well; walk neighborhood; drive to Pittsburgh

October 25: Fly home

October 26-November 14: Write up research, read, rest

**Websites:**

<http://www.stlukechurch.com/index.php>

<http://evergreenlife.org/>

<http://www.seattlequest.org/>

<http://vineyard-cc.org/index.shtml>

<http://www.apostleschurch.org/home.php>

<http://www.lifeonthevine.org/>

<http://www.htcchicago.org/>

<http://www.missio-dei.com/>

[http://www.whchurch.org/content/page\\_1.htm](http://www.whchurch.org/content/page_1.htm)

<http://www.solomonsporch.com/>

<http://www.kaleochurch.com/>

<http://mountainsidecommunion.org/site/index.php>

<http://www.hollywoodsda.org/>

<http://sdunited.org/>

<http://www.kairos.la>

<http://www.hotmetalbridge.com/>

<http://www.pghopendoor.org/>

<http://www.inwardoutward.org/page/festival-church>

<http://www.missionfellowship.com/>

<http://church.thewellpa.com/>

<http://www.vintagechurch.org/>

<http://upcfresno.org/>

<http://www.northfresnochurch.com/Home.asp>

[http://www.gum.org/gfcc\\_home.htm](http://www.gum.org/gfcc_home.htm)

**Denominations:**

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Nondenominational

Evangelical Covenant

Vineyard

Episcopal

Christian Missionary Alliance

Presbyterian Church in America

Baptist General Conference

Church of the Nazarene

Seventh-Day Adventist

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

United Methodist Church

Southern Baptist Convention

Mennonite Brethren

Cumberland Presbyterian Church