FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
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Dear Friends,

I first came across the practice of sabbaticals in academia. Every semester in college, it seemed like another professor was away to write their book or do their field research. It seemed like a great system to my undergraduate eyes – taking time away to do the big things that were too hard to fit in amidst the vagaries of regular life.

Of course, sabbaticals come from a much older, and faith-based, source – the Bible. (Surprise!) As you may well know, right at the beginning of Scripture, God rests on the seventh day of creation. Then again in Leviticus 25:1-7 – which you can read here oremus Bible Browser : Lev 25:1-7 – the very earth of the Promised Land is given one year out of seven to rest and recuperate. So at its core, a sabbatical is about creation, rest, and re-creation. Many churches have the practice of sabbaticals for clergy. Presbyterian churches in our denomination offer sabbaticals every seven years, although at First Presbyterian, it's after five.

On April 21, the day after Easter, I'll begin my sabbatical. I will be back at the end of June, and then I'll have another week or two off at the end of July/beginning of August. This is the second sabbatical I've had in my career. The first one was very much about catching up on missed continuing education with the purpose of revamping Christian education and youth ministries. This one – not so much. Nor am I doing field research or writing a book.

Rather, I'll be resting. In particular, I'll be working on some healthier and more athletic practices in my life, which might not be resting, per se, but are definitely working towards resetting my body to factory settings. That will include some new exercise practices and a Spiritual pilgrimage in Scotland with (who has a traditional summer sabbatical this year), Tate and Lucy. We'll also do some sightseeing while across the Pond. I'll also be participating in two week-long conferences at Montreat, a place I love dearly. One is a yearly event for me, and the other is new to me. Finally, I'll be doing some reading, thinking and connecting with colleagues, to see what might spring up in a time of unplanned growth.

In the meantime, I'll do what all clergy folks do – depend on a team of fabulous and faithful folks to carry the things I'm putting down. The ***Rev. Heidi Biermann*** and then ***Elder Mimi Dunn*** will serve as Bridge Youth Ministers, in succession. Heidi will take over the end of the program year – youth group, senior blessings and the stock sale – and then Mimi will staff the beginning of summer and Appalachia Service Project. (I will be back for the middle school mission trip, Massanetta and Montreat.) ***Kathy Krahenbuhl, Brent Curtis and the Racial Equity Task Force*** will guide Faith & Community and the summer book series. ***The Christian Education Committee***,

chaired by ***Elder Katharine Whitmore*** and staffed by ***Director of Children's Ministry Lenore Champion***, will shepherd the end of one faith formation year and preparations for the next. And of course, ***Revs. Mindy Douglas and Esther Hethcox*** will lead that much more of Sunday worship than usual. I am thankful to each and every one of them for their leadership and enabling my time away.

And I am thankful to you – a church that values their clergy such that sabbaticals are expected and 'no big deal.' I will miss worshipping with you, learning with you, praying with you, and especially of the fabulous year-end/early summer ministries that are a part of our life together. I am excited to see what comes out of the ground in these sabbath days.

Grace & Peace,

John Weicher