1. Your name, congregation/city and church size
2. What is a sabbatical? How does it work?
3. How can a small congregation afford sending pastor on sabbatical?
4. What were the benefits to you and the congregation?
5. What else would you like to tell us about the sabbatical?

1. Pastor John Stransky - St. John Lutheran Church and School, Wausau, Township of Easton. We are a church of about 210 Family Units and worship around 150 souls weekly. In addition, we have a Pre-K-8 school with 75 students.

2. My sabbatical was a time of rest and renewal; spiritually, physically, mentally, and relationally. To accomplish this all of the activities that were part of the sabbatical focused on one of the following areas:

   Retreat will be specific time away from home for me as well as at least one retreat with Jennifer. The retreat time will be used as a disconnection from the busyness of work and life to slow down as well as the end of the sabbatical to prepare for returning to duties.

   Re-Connection will focus on two areas of needed reconnection, first is my immediate family, second will be individuals I have not had person contact with in a long period of time. This may include college, former employment, seminary, and/or extended family.

   Recreation will be just that recreation time including fishing, walking, taking in baseball games, outdoor and indoor activities.

   Creating Memories is what I desire from this sabbatical. Memories for time with family, friends, and growing my relationship with God.

   In order to do this St. John and I had to have a system of disconnection, allowing me to focus on the goals of the sabbatical while also not being concerned about what was going on “back in the office.” As many pastors know this is not as easily done as it sounds. St. John blessed me with a full three-month sabbatical, which begin on June 15th and ended September 15th. During this time, I was able to travel, learn, and most important to me was my reconnection and creating memories with others, especially my wife and children.

3. It is a sacrifice for the congregation to send their pastor on sabbatical, the largest additional expense is paying for a guest pastor(s) for twelve Sundays while also continuing to pay regular salary and benefits to your pastor. This is where planning is very important, St. John planned over a two-year period, budgeting each year to save the funds needed for the guest pastoring. We utilized our regular budget for this. In addition, donations were given through the church for a “Sabbatical Fund” which were to be utilized for “Church Related” expenses; such as retreats and conferences. Prior to the send-off; members of the congregation

also gifted me with funds to help create memories while away. My wife and I also saved and used personal resources to cover costs during the sabbatical.

4. The benefits of a sabbatical are incredible when you look back on it. One of the things I was struggling with was a keeping a regular personal prayer and devotional life; I prayed for others and read my Bible daily for sermon and Bible Study prep, but I was not doing anything to fill me spiritually beyond that. The other benefit is a spiritual refueling that I was not aware I needed, through the retreats and re-connections I was able to refuel here as well. The next benefit is two-fold; St. John and I realized that the pastor does not need to be involved in every decision, activity, and daily church activity; including emergency coverage for a last minute “Sunday Morning” cancellation. St. John also benefited from learning how to visit shut-ins, homebound, and hospitals while I was away.

5. There are many things I would love to share, but space is limited. I am very willing to speak with other pastors as well as other church leaders regarding my sabbatical; the elders of St. John can join me if you would like to hear from their perspective. There are two things that I will share:

    1. There are two types of sabbaticals: Proactive or Reactive, my sabbatical was proactive. A proactive sabbatical is one that happens prior to a pastoral burn-out and as a way to prevent it from happening. This is the best way to offer your pastor a sabbatical. A reactive sabbatical is one in which there is an issue or burnout is already there, while a sabbatical may be necessary the benefits of a reactive sabbatical are not as great, and potential outcomes may not be able to be as able to be predicted.
    2. Communication is the key right from the start. Fortunately, you are not recreating the wheel and there is a lot of help out there for churches to plan a sabbatical. Planning for a sabbatical is not something just the pastor plans; a good committee walking along side him is critical.

    I encourage you to talk with your pastor about blessing them with a sabbatical. I encourage pastors to have honest conversations about a sabbatical. A sabbatical is not an extended vacation, it is a time or rest and renewal; spiritually, physical, mentally, and relationally. Please reach out to me with any questions.