

Sabbath means rest. The term refers to the seventh day of creation where God rests from the creative labors of the previous six days. Six days to work. The seventh day you rest. Not a bad system. Indeed, the sabbath is a sort of reminder set in time that we do not just live to work nor work to live, but we should also retreat from such endeavors so as not to be defined solely by what we do. Furthermore, stepping away allows for a broader perspective. We are not the center of the universe. The world continues on without our toil. The creation is here for our enjoyment; why not enjoy it? There is a rhythm in life and rest is a critical element to that rhythm. While the trigger exists to step away weekly, organizations like the church also recognize the rhythm of extended rest every seven years. I'm almost 23 years late in taking that initial seven year break. Thus, it is with tremendous gratitude that I recognize the work of Susanne Woods, Cathy Ostuw, Patricia Lydon, Betsy Adams, Jane Lazgin, and Sue Rutz for making possible my first sabbatical in 30 years of ministry to take place during the summer of 2022. Our proposal for a Lilly Foundation Grant to cover this sabbatical was just submitted. It is an impressive document. Particular thanks goes to Susanne Woods and Cathy Ostuw for developing and honing the final proposal. It is worth reading and you can see it [here](#).

We will hear in August whether the proposal was successful or not. With the quality of people working on this, I am very optimistic. However, the Grant process is very competitive. Regardless, because of the work of Patricia Lydon, Betsy Adams, Jane Lazgin, and Sue Rutz, a Vision Fund has been created. If we are not successful with the Lilly Grant, there will be funds available to take the sabbatical. Again, I cannot thank these women and those who made this possible enough. Furthermore, the Cottage Meetings of last summer and fall were used in the development of the proposal, and this information is the foundation for ongoing work at the vestry level for planning at St. Francis. Joan Carty, Jim Hawkins, and Suzanne Stevens comprise the St. Francis Futures committee that is working on categorizing and prioritizing the items from the Cottage Meetings, with the hope of a blueprint for our life together going forward. At each step along the way, I am deeply impressed and grateful for the skill, faithfulness, creativity, and generous spirit of those who lead us. We are blessed.

All of this comes amidst what we hope is the beginning of the end to this unbelievably long and arduous pandemic. May we return to some sense of normalcy soon! While we are close, we are not quite at the point to return to in person worship. On our weekly Zoom meeting with Bishop Douglas and Ahrens of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut, there is no small amount of concern and, in some quarters, gnashing of teeth over getting back to in person worship. Some churches have opened their doors. Others are under a great deal of pressure to do so. And throughout the conversation around this topic is not only rife with safety concerns but also worry about the future of the church. Indeed, some go so far as to say that if we do not get back to in person worship, the church will die.

I recognize this concern, but I do not share the conclusion. In the same way as sabbath is a reminder that there is more beyond each one of us, the idea that in person worship is the

salvation of a tradition that has experienced declining attendance for 40+ years is a little myopic. And while we are responsible for our communities and structures, there also needs to be that space where we recognize that we are part of something much larger than our communities and our structures. God is afoot in the world, and our task is not to shoehorn God into our desires, deeds, or devices. Our task is to seek to align ourselves with God's work of love, reconciliation, and justice that is always already taking place in the world. We need to look and listen and breathe, and hopefully we catch the coattails of the Holy and that holy work that we are invited into. This can certainly happen in a worship setting. It also, undeniably, happens every moment of every day in unfathomably diverse and particular ways. So, let's be of good cheer. Let's be gentle with ourselves and one another. Let's remember that God is bigger than all the cares and concerns that burden us. And, specifically, God desires for us to let go of the burdens and to live a little more fully, a little more freely, and a little more lastingly with the knowledge that we are loved and accepted and nothing will separate us from the love of God. Not a bad promise to rest in.