1 YEAR SABBATICAL PRAYER / PLANNING GUIDE

NORTHWEST DISTRICT CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE

If married, include your spouse in this prayer and discernment process.

Here are the top prayerful considerations pastors can begin praying through:

1. **What is the real purpose of the sabbatical?**
   Is the primary need rest, spiritual renewal, emotional recovery, family connection, study, vision, or some combination? Every one of us is different. We go through seasons so your sabbatical may look very different from someone else's. A great place to start is to ask myself "When this sabbatical is over what do I hope will be different?"

2. **What is God inviting me to release?**
   Sabbatical requires surrendering control. Pray about what responsibilities, relationships, expectations, or identity issues have become too dependent upon you. Ask: *Will God's church function without me—and can I allow it to? Believe it or not, sabbatical is important for your church, not just for you. Thinking through this question may lead your church to a new and better place as well.*

3. **How healthy am I entering the sabbatical?**
   Consider spiritual, emotional, relational, and physical health. Ideally, a sabbatical should not simply rescue a pastor from total exhaustion. Sabbatical is a biblical concept, a God idea, not just a good idea. Starting healthy rhythms now can prepare you for your time away.

4. **What does my spouse and family need from this season?**
   Sabbaticals affect the whole household. Ask what would make the season restorative for everyone?

5. **Who needs to become stronger while I am gone?**
   A sabbatical can be an important leadership-development opportunity. Identify pastors, staff, board members, and ministry leaders who need to be empowered and encouraged before you leave.

6. **What will the boundaries of the sabbatical be?**
   Decide well in advance: Will you answer texts? Check email? Attend a church? Respond to emergencies? Clear boundaries are crucial.

7. **How will I finance Sabbatical?**
   Salary needs to continue. But also consider travel, housing, pulpit supply, additional staffing costs, counseling and retreat expenses. Who will contribute? Local Church? District? Shepherd Renewal Ministry? Other Grants? Personal resources (savings, travel or credit card points)? Honestly, When we begin to trust God with this process it is amazing the resources that become available.

8. **How will I plan my time?**
   What will I do? Also, what will I not do? How long will it be?

9. **Who will help me plan?**
   Consider a spiritual director, counselor, coach, mentor, or trusted pastoral friend. That person may also become the champion of sabbatical on your behalf for the congregation.

10. **How will I prepare the congregation?**
    Sabbaticals should be framed positively—not as the pastor escaping the church, but as a healthy practice that benefits both pastor and congregation. Talk about this early and often.

11. **What will reentry look like?**
    Begin planning the return before you leave. Avoid returning on Saturday and preaching Sunday morning. Allow space to reconnect and gradually resume responsibilities.

12. **What might God want to change permanently?**
    Perhaps the most important prayer is:
    "Lord, don't just help me recover enough to return to my old life. Show me what should be different when I come back."

A helpful framework for the year leading up to sabbatical could be:

12–9 months: Discern the purpose. Begin developing a plan.
9–6 months: Strengthen leaders and systems. Formalize a plan
6–2 months: Communicate and establish boundaries and the plan.
2–1 months: Gradually empower others and release responsibilities.

Sabbatical: Rest, receive, reconnect, and listen. (Some say "Rest, Restore, Resource, Re-vision & Re-engage").

Return: Reenter slowly and incorporate what God taught you.

As you prepare for Sabbatical please remember:

A good sabbatical isn't merely preparation to do ministry again; it is an opportunity to remember who you are when you aren't doing ministry.

When the Lord told the people to let the ground lay fallow for one year in seven it looked like nothing was happening. Far from that the land was being re-vitalized and prepared for a great harvest These rhythms of The Lord are powerful and will reap great spiritual, physical and emotional benefits if we practice them with prayer and a plan.