

Lilly Foundation Clergy Renewal Grant Proposal

1. Begin with a summary statement describing the overall character and purpose of the renewal program you are proposing.

The theme of this proposed sabbatical: *"Reformed and Always Being Reformed: A Dual Sabbatical Exploring Reformation History and Spirituality"* reflects the identities and interests of First Presbyterian Church of Auburn's Co-Pastors, Revs. Nick and Kathy Reed. Serving as Co-Pastors for over five years, the Reeds share a deep love of the Reformed theological tradition they seek to explore in creative new ways. Nick, a lover of history, hopes to use this time to delve deeply into Reformation history and its implications for the church today: What does it truly mean to be "Reformed"? Kathy, currently pursuing her Doctorate of Ministry, has a passion for spiritual formation and is interested in exploring what a distinctively Reformed spirituality looks like and means to a church that is "Always Being Reformed."

The Reeds are also parents to three children under age 10. Nick and Kathy often reflect on how deeply their family identity is rooted in the church. One of the goals for this sabbatical is to spend time worshipping together in church and non-church settings where Nick and Kathy are not in leadership roles. They hope to explore their family identity as well as new experiences that might help them grow more connected to God and one another in their life together as a family that is "Reformed and Always Being Reformed."

2. Provide a clearly articulated rationale for engaging in the clergy renewal program. Include a discussion about why this is an appropriate time for the pastor and congregation to participate. To present a strong application, please give careful thought to the connection between the purpose, the proposed activities and your rationale. Programs that are coherent, well-integrated and possess a degree of thematic unity often are the most compelling. Your responses to these first two questions should convey these characteristics.

Both pastors and members of our church's session agree that this is an excellent time in the life of the congregation and the lives of our pastors for sabbatical renewal. The church, which for many years has been in the practice of granting sabbatical leave to its pastors, understands that this time away will benefit both parties. Drawing from the sabbatical theme, "Reformed and Always Being Reformed" and the foci of history and spirituality, our pastors have spent the last 6+ years coming to understand and value the particular history of First Presbyterian Church of Auburn. They believe the church is built upon a strong foundation and have deep trust in the current session elders and church staff members. Having just undergone numerous reforms to allow

our congregation to worship together and maintain our rich educational, mission, and fellowship activities while also practicing social distancing to prevent the spread of coronavirus, we have been overwhelmed by the creativity, flexibility, and resilience of our church family. Members have volunteered their time and technological skills to make our virtual services, distance learning, and remote congregational care great successes.

Beyond pandemic preparation and prevention that all churches now face, our congregation is also dealing with particular challenges that make this the perfect time to intentionally discern what it means that we are "Always Being Reformed." The physical landscape of our surrounding community is in the midst of dramatic growth and concomitant building boom, an upheaval with implications for our members' transportation and accessibility. The role of the mainline Protestant church is transforming before our very eyes as the popularity of the non-denominational "mega-church" continues to grow. Reflecting upon our identity ("Reformed") and how we are "Always Being Reformed" will help us understand our particular value and call in our local community and beyond. The congregation shares the dual interests of Reformation history and reformed spirituality of the co-pastors and is anxious to use this sabbatical experience to discern its way forward in a changing landscape of both physical challenges and the growing popularity of mega-churches in the area (particularly in the appeal of mega-churches to college students and young families).

3. Present a thorough narrative description of the pastor's activities and timeline for the renewal program. Include a brief description and a rationale for each of these activities. This section is where you will give the fullest description of your plans and describe how the pieces fit together into a coherent whole. Use the Outline of Renewal Program form to list in sequence the proposed date(s) for each activity and the names of any family members or associates who will attend or travel with the pastor as a part of this program.

Please Note: Because of the Reed children's school schedule, Nick and Kathy's sabbatical leave will be staggered by one week on each end.

5/16-5/22/2021 (Kathy begins leave, Nick continues work while kids are in school)

Ghost Ranch Education and Retreat Center: Abiquiu, NM

- Kathy: begins exploration of Reformed spirituality at this PC(USA) conference center.

5/23-6/5/2021 (Nick and Kathy now both on leave, children will join)

Montreat Conference Center: Montreat, NC

- Nick utilizes the resources of the Presbyterian Heritage Center

- Kathy participates in classes/workshops offered focusing on spirituality and worship

- Reed Family: worships together regularly at conference center, sabbath time (hiking, art, playing, etc.)

6/6-6/13/2021 (All members of Reed Family)

Peer Group Annual Gathering: Ft. Morgan, AL

- This group of six clergy families has been meeting for a week of sabbath and reflection since 2009. We intend to use this time to engage in conversation as to what it means to be a clergy family in the Reformed tradition and ask questions of those with older children as to how they navigate their family's spiritual growth in the pre-teen years.

6/14-6/19/2021

Preparation Time for Travel to Scotland

6/20-7/31/2021 (All members of Reed Family + Nanny/Caregiver)

Scotland

- The bulk of the sabbatical, the Reeds' hope is to identify a town in the central belt of Scotland and rent a home for six weeks that would serve as the family's "home base." They are working with colleagues to identify a church that could serve as the family's regular place of worship. They are also planning on inviting Nick's sister to join and to serve as nanny/caregiver for the children. Throughout their time in Scotland the Reeds hope to live a slower-paced life filled with time for walking, hiking, and exploring. Nick and Kathy have planned excursions to sights relevant to Presbyterian/Reformation history and spirituality, such as...

8/1-8/8/2021

Reentry to the US

- The last week of Kathy's sabbatical (children return to school on 8/10/2021). Kathy may spend 2-3 nights in Decatur, GA at Columbia Seminary as a final time of reflection/retreat.

8/9-8/16/2021 (Kathy back at work, Nick's final week of leave)

Zephyr Point: Zephyr Cove, NV

- Nick: reflection, reading, time in nature at this PC(USA) Conference Center

4. Provide a statement written by the pastor that describes the intended benefits, both for the pastor and for the congregation, of the program as planned.

Now in our sixth year of service at First Presbyterian Church of Auburn, we continue to be inspired and deeply grateful for the steadfast love of God and neighbor

this congregation consistently demonstrates. As our surrounding community undergoes significant change above and beyond responding to COVID19–Auburn has grown tremendously even in the 5-6 years we have lived here–and the role and responsibilities of the mainline Protestant church continue to evolve in our wider culture, we are grateful to have this opportunity for sabbatical renewal. We believe that among the many benefits to us and our congregation are:

A chance to revisit our tradition's history and solidify our identity as a Reformed people. We are a church with a particular history that we revisit often in sermons, Sunday school classes, and other special programs. However, this congregation is also a part of a larger history and tradition that holds great insight and value for us as we seek to do faithful ministry in the world today. Intentional time and energy spent studying the history of the Reformed tradition would only strengthen our sense of identity and purpose.

The opportunity to rest from our labors. Since we began our work at First Presbyterian in December of 2014 we have enjoyed many years of growth that can be quantified in both numbers and spirit. Major projects have been successfully undertaken. New administrative systems have been implemented. Precious loved ones (both members of the congregation and members of our extended families) have been buried. Our youngest child was born in 2016 and all three of our children have flourished in this wonderful community. We hope to remain in ministry here at FPC Auburn for many years to come and believe that this opportunity to set aside our day-to-day tasks of preparing worship, offering pastoral care, and tending to administrative duties will allow us time to experience a level of sabbath not possible otherwise.

In addition to having time and space to rest and pursue our personal passions related to ministry (history and spirituality) we are also eager for our family to have the opportunity to step outside the role of being the “pastors’ family” for a period of time. We look forward to attending worship together. We have already identified which churches we will attend the weeks we are in Auburn and Montreat, and we plan to identify a “home church” for the Scotland leg of our trip to provide us with a consistent worship experience. We also look forward to stepping away from our rigorous schedule of sports practices and music lessons to experience travel and recreation in a way we never have before, which leads us to what we believe to be the most significant benefit for us and our congregation...

Allowing this sabbatical period to help us identify key aspects of our identity as Reformed Christians so that we might move forward in ministry with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love. These particular characteristics “energy, intelligence, imagination, and love” are borrowed from the ordination vows of the Presbyterian Church (USA), but this is our sincere hope for both ourselves and our congregation. Being reminded of who we are and what has made our tradition resilient

throughout the ages will help us all better discern what faithful ministry might look like in the next decade of change in our local community and the wider church.

5. Provide a similar statement written by a representative of the congregation that describes the intended benefits both for the congregation and the pastor. This statement should summarize the congregation's views and should be incorporated into the body of the proposal. Do not include letters from individual members of the congregation.

There is no doubt that sabbaticals provide pastors with professional improvement opportunities that further their knowledge, expertise, experience, and abilities in significant ways, but it is often left unstated that church congregations and stakeholders benefit greatly from providing sabbatical opportunities to their pastors. The shared benefits of sabbaticals to both clergy and institution are noteworthy, and it is my pleasure, as a member of the congregation, to address the intended benefits both for the congregation and our pastors in this statement.

Our congregation represents a faith-based community of professionals who are familiar with the concepts of sabbatical and study leave, either from their own personal experience as university professors or from knowledge gained as a spouse, friend, or relative of one of the many Auburn University employees who attend our church. As a church with many K-12 teachers and families with school-age children, we understand the rhythms of the academic year with periods of intense work while school is in session and time for reflection, renewal, special projects, and personal development, and professional development during summer and winter breaks. Ask any professor or teacher at FPC if these breaks are "vacations" and they will knowingly chuckle that this is when some of the most important "work" gets done. Indeed, we as a congregation, and I as a university administrator, know first-hand the benefits of the opportunity for rejuvenation and enhanced productivity for Kathy and Nick Reed as they prepare to take a well-earned sabbatical. We welcome the opportunity to give them space to experience a replenishment of spirit, to pursue their professional passions in ways that directly relate to their ministries, and to worship and observe sabbath with their family without the interruptions that ministering to congregants necessitates, even if willingly and unhesitatingly undertaken. Indeed, Kathy and Nick are exemplars of the call Paul makes to the disciples to give "not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Cor 9:7)

Psalms 46:10 reminds us of the Lord's command to "Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth." Providing our pastors with sabbatical leave will give them prolonged time away from their charge and allow them to be still and know God. Such renewal, replenishment, and rejuvenation of the spirit is difficult, if not impossible, when faced with daily responsibilities as spiritual

leaders of our congregation. Kathy and Nick have led our congregation through great changes to our programming, especially the revamping of our elementary education programs under the direction of our first-ever full-time Director of Children and Youth, and they have guided us through several other staff searches including Associate Pastor and Choir Director. Change is always hard, especially for Presbyterian congregations it seems, and Kathy and Nick have remained tireless and joyful in their administration of a changing staff and growing congregation in a manner that has brought confidence and calm to us all. We have also experienced in the last five years the deaths of several long-time members dearly beloved by the congregation. Kathy and Nick have presided over these memorials with a grace and humility that comforted us greatly at these difficult moments. They have responded to COVID19 closures with creativity, enthusiasm, and great energy, steering our worship, education, ministries, and fellowship online in meaningful ways. We are tired just thinking of all the tasks accomplished and goals achieved by Kathy and Nick, and it is a sign of our deep gratitude that we want to see them go, take important time away from us, and refresh. The worst thing we can imagine is that our pastors experience burnout, a danger for all in the "caring professions," but especially those in the church. They hear our concerns, share our burdens, keep our confidences, and it is time for them to rest.

Stephen Covey's encouragement to "sharpen the saw" (*7 Habits of Highly Effective People*) comes to mind when considering an opportunity for reflection in order to become more productive and to improve oneself. Our congregation sees this sabbatical experience as a time for Kathy and to sharpen their saws metaphorically by dedicating concentrated study to expand their knowledge and experience in Reformation history and spirituality. Both of them are avid readers and eager students, and we thrill to think of how much they will learn, absorb, and share with us after extended and concentrated study.

The congregation's 2019 Lenten Study Series used *Sabbath as Resistance* by Walter Brueggemann as the central resource for reflection and exploration. Nick and Kathy led the analysis and provided us with a rich opportunity to examine the concepts of simplicity, reflection, and spirituality. These lessons have helped us to bring a new focus on sabbath in our daily lives that have suffered, for too long, from an incessant distraction of the daily grind of modern living. We feel strongly that providing the pastors with sabbatical leave will give them the chance to reap the rich rewards of sabbath.

Likewise, their sabbath will provide us, the congregation, with exciting opportunities to take ownership over responsibilities in the pastors' absence such as congregational care, working with guest preachers, and greater participation in the organizational work of the church. By engaging a broad group of church members under the leadership of the ruling elders, we can offer new ways for the members to be active in the life of the church, especially the many new members we have welcomed

during the tenure of Kathy and Nick, who may not yet feel the full connection and belonging so crucial to the wellbeing of our church family. We feel that this work will be rejuvenating for us as we play enhanced roles in the church's work. These opportunities will nurture our leadership skills and promote self-reliance that will strengthen our congregation in ways not as readily available when we have our pastors so close at hand.

Although the pastors play an important role in our church, we are excited about renewing our understanding and appreciation that the identity of the church is found in Jesus Christ. We take our charge from Ephesians 4: 15-16: "But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love." We have no doubt that a key outcome of the sabbatical experience will be spiritual growth for all of us as the body of Christ and an important reminder that without our active engagement in the life and health of the church, we put too much burden and stress on our beloved pastors.

Indeed, the congregation will benefit immensely from the professional growth of both Kathy and Nick, for they will return to their work renewed, rejuvenated, and brimming with new ideas, information, and energy to share.

Respectfully, Emmett Winn, Elder and Chair of the First Presbyterian Church
Personnel Committee