

Frequently Asked Questions

“A Summer of Exploring Creative Play and Spirituality”

Q. What is a Sabbatical?

A. The word *sabbatical* comes from *Sabbath* (Hebrew, Shabbat) meaning to cease or desist. The terms “Sabbath” and “sabbatical” are synonymous. In their most basic roots, both are ideals of a transformation, emotionally and even physically. Both words are metaphors for paradise and a testimony to God’s presence, bringing tranquility, serenity, peace and repose.

“From the beginning of creation, God established times for us to cease our striving and set aside our work in order to renew and recenter our lives. These times, whether a night of rest, a day of worship each week, or a fallow time every few years, are called sabbaticals. Sabbatical leave is a carefully planned period of time in which a pastor is granted leave away from his or her normal ministerial responsibilities in order to spend an extended period of time in study and reflection.” (excerpt from Letter to COTH Congregation from Sabbatical Team, April, 2010)

The Presbytery of Denver Committee on Ministry endorses and encourages the concept and practice of sabbatical leave for our pastors. Dee’s Terms of Call specify a three month sabbatical to be taken during her 5th year at Church of the Hills. Dee’s sabbatical is scheduled for this summer, 2011.

Q. What is the Purpose of a Sabbatical?

A. Craig Dykstra, senior vice president for religion at the Lilly Endowment program (from where Dee received her grant) states, “The intensity and demanding character of pastoral work in most congregations is difficult for many to appreciate. The National Clergy Renewal Program gives pastors the gift of being able to live for a while at a different pace and in an alternative environment – to live in Sabbath time and space, and to honor that moment as God-given.” (from a press release by Lilly Endowment, Dec 6, 2010)

Sanctifying a sabbatical is part of our imitation of God, but it also becomes a way to find God’s presence and likeness. How do we perceive God’s presence? By shutting off secular demands and refraining from work. This creates a restfulness that is also a celebration. Sabbaticals, too, are miracles. The soul is resurrected, an additional soul arrives, along with a brilliant radiance of holiness. (source: *The Sabbath*, by A.J. Heschel)

Q. What are the benefits of a Sabbatical?

A. There are numerous benefits to both the pastor who takes a sabbatical and to his or her congregation. Pastors interviewed by Char Ray reported enthusiastically that they experienced renewal; a profound rest on a deeper level than at any other time in their lives. Every pastor interviewed returned to his or her congregation with a renewed sense of commitment and joy in ministry. Here are comments, in their own words, from just a few of those pastors:

"[My congregation] got back a refreshed and renewed pastor. All people are in need Sabbath rest, but pastors are least likely to get it." (Ann Bolson, Pastor of Wild Rose UCC in Evergreen)

"I found I was able to rest at a deep level . . . I came back refreshed and ready for the next chapter at New Hope . . . I think my congregation would say that they have seen a renewed vitality and energy in me." (Russ Kane, pastor of New Hope Presbyterian Church in Castle Rock)

"When I returned to ministry I was able to enter into a deeper relationship with the people, but to do so with clarity of direction and purpose." (Stan Jewell, retired Presbyterian pastor, Denver Presbytery)

Congregants themselves echoed the comments of their pastors, and also reported that they gained a renewed sense of involvement and developed leadership abilities they didn't know they had. Several congregations reported that they incorporated activities and pursuits that allowed them to experience a brief sabbatical during the time their pastor was away.

Q. When is Dee's Sabbatical scheduled?

A. Pastor Dee's Sabbatical is scheduled for this summer, June 6th through September 5th, 2011.

Dates	Location	Description
June	Carmel, California	Sea Kayaking with seals, otters, sea lions; Institute of Play
Early July	Dominican Republic	Swimming with dolphins
Late July	Bend, Oregon	Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch working with horses and youth
August	South Africa; Tanzania	Ukutula (lion cubs) and Ann Van Dyk Cheetah Center; Kruger National Park; climbing Kilimanjaro

Q. What will Dee be doing and where is she going on her Sabbatical?

A. Dee's overall itinerary and detailed sabbatical theme is listed in the Lilly Grant application package available in the Narthex. Her sabbatical will include workshops, travel, and prayerful consideration of integrating the concept of play into spiritual reflection and growth. She will travel within the United States, the Dominican Republic, and Africa. The complete itinerary is available in the Narthex and will be updated as travel plans are finalized.

Q. What is the Lilly Endowment Grant?

A. Pastor Dee was rewarded a Lilly Endowment Grant to cover the costs of her Sabbatical and to cover additional costs incurred by Church of the Hills during the time she is gone. This prestigious, competitive grant provides up to \$50,000 to support an extended period of intentional reflection and renewal for ministers.

According to the Lilly Endowment December 2010 press release (available in Narthex), 149 ministers were awarded the Lilly grant in 2010. The program allows pastors to step back from their busy lives and gain the fresh perspective and renewed energy that a carefully considered season of travel, study, rest and prayer can provide. Pastors, working with their congregations, designed their renewal periods to suit their own needs and aspirations. The pastors are encouraged to include their families and friends in the renewal activities.

What these pastors choose to do with their three- or four-month “gift of time” varies widely. Many of the pastors will venture far from their home grounds to visit the Holy Land or other places of familial or religious significance, to join colleagues who are engaged in ministries and missionary work elsewhere in the world, to hone their skills in music, writing and the arts, or to engage in theological study and spiritual retreats. Next summer more than 20 pastors will embark on journeys to biblical sites to participate in archaeological digs, go on pilgrimages to Jordan and Egypt, or trace the footsteps of St. Paul in Greece and Turkey. Twenty-nine more pastors will head for Africa to visit churches, teach in seminaries, work with orphan children – or with orphaned lion cubs (That’s our Pastor Dee).

“The wealth of imagination unleashed by this program is truly wonderful to see,” says the Endowment’s Dykstra. “We can think of no better way to honor these hardworking, faithful men and women than to help them experience personal growth and renewal in ways that they themselves believe will feed them most deeply.”

Q. Why now? This seems like a difficult economic time, both worldwide and for Church of the Hills.

A. Pastor Dee’s terms of call when hired state that she is due a Sabbatical for every five years of service to Church of the Hills. This is a standard term of call for most Presbyterian Ministers. We are grateful that Dee and the Church has received the Lilly Endowment Grant to fully cover her sabbatical expenses, which means the church will not incur additional expenses above the typical operating budget.

Q. I never got a Sabbatical in all my working years. Why do pastors get Sabbaticals?

A. The Committee on Ministry, Presbytery of Denver states, “The enormous demands of the ministry are recognized by nearly everyone. The constant pressures of preparing for and leading worship, counseling, visitation, facilitating committees, administrative duties, dealing with crisis situations, and community and denominational commitments are realities faced by pastors every week. These challenges are met month after month, year after year, with virtually no let up in the schedule.”

Sabbatical leave is more common in ecumenical and higher education settings than in the corporate work world, where salaries tend to be lower than commensurate positions in the private sector.

Q. Will the Church still pay Dee's salary while she is on Sabbatical?

A. Yes. The Committee on Ministry, Presbytery of Denver Parameters for a Sabbatical Leave Policy document states, "During the leave period the pastor on sabbatical continues to be compensated at the normal rate of pay, including Board of Pension dues." Church of the Hills will not be covering any expenses related to Dee's Sabbatical.

Q. Academic sabbaticals typically use this time to complete research or publications. Will there be specific things Dee is required to complete while she is on Sabbatical, like a book or a written report for Presbytery?

A. There are no specific products, deliverables, or outcomes required of Dee during her sabbatical. The primary intent of a sabbatical for pastors serving within PC(USA), including the Presbytery of Denver, is rest, renewal, and reflection and does not require or encourage specific tangible items to be completed while on sabbatical. The Committee on Ministry, Presbytery of Denver states, "A sabbatical leave provides an opportunity for a pastor to be nurtured. The renewing power of sabbatical time allows time for replenishment, revitalization, new vision, and refreshment of the soul. It can be a time of travel, personal study, reflection, contemplation, rest and prayer. Or it can be a combination of these and other events."

Q. What are the terms of the Lilly Grant? Can the Church use the funds in other ways in addition to, or instead of, Dee's Sabbatical expenses? Can Dee use the funds for herself instead of using it for a Sabbatical?

A. No. Upon receipt of the grant award, Dee and the Church entered into a grant agreement (the final grant application and the award letter with contract is available in the Narthex for review) with the Lilly Endowment. The terms of the award are very clearly defined in the contract. Expenses related to the sabbatical as covered by the award must be clearly and accurately reported to the Endowment; reallocation of budgeted items must be approved by the Endowment; and the Endowment may monitor and audit the sabbatical account at any time.

Article 4. Section b. of the agreement states, in part, "Under no circumstances may grant funds be expended, borrowed (inter-fund), pledged or transferred for reasons unassociated with the stated purpose of this grant."

Q. Does Dee manage the Lilly funds herself? What are the checks and balances? And what happens to remaining funds, if any, or if the funds run short?

A. Dee is responsible for managing the grant monies and the church has a specified, separate account for the funds, as suggested by the Lilly Foundation. There are clear reporting mechanisms in place through the Lilly Endowment to provide checks and balances and appropriate auditing of the Award monies. Article 10 of the Grant Agreement states, in part, "...any portion of the grant unexpended at the completion of the project [Sabbatical] or at the end of the period shall be repaid to the Endowment within 30 days unless the endowment, in its sole discretion, shall otherwise specify in writing."

The budget as submitted to the Lilly Endowment was carefully researched, including good faith estimates on the variable items (such as air fare). Dee is responsible to stay within the budget so there will be no shortfall.

Q. I hear Dee is taking friends with her on her Sabbatical travels. Does the grant pay for friends? Is that appropriate?

A. Yes, Dee will have travel companions and appropriate portions of their expenses will be covered by the grant monies. The Lilly Grant application encourages travel companions (family members or friends) and Dee's application explicitly lists her travel companions (page 11) in the form within the section titled "People who will accompany you whose expenses would be paid by this grant." The travel budget as submitted, and approved, in the Lilly application includes travel expenses for Dee and for her travel companions.

Q. Is \$8,000 really enough to cover all the church expenses for the summer?

A. Yes. This amount was carefully calculated to cover any church expenses incurred during, and because of, Dee's sabbatical. Normal summer church operating expenses, including Dee's typical salary, will be covered in the COTH operating budget. Expenses related to Dee being on sabbatical including an intern, compensation for visiting pastors, a stipend for a qualified Session moderator, post-sabbatical workshops, and renewal activities totaling \$8,450 are covered by the grant.

Q. Why do we need an Intern? Shouldn't that be covered in COTH's operating expenses since the Intern will be here for more than the 3-month Sabbatical time?

A. As we discovered from our experience in 2010, a seminary intern can be a great asset to our church, fulfilling specific roles to support the church's overall mission and programs. During the three months of Dee's sabbatical, our 2011 intern will take on greater responsibility for pastoral care, supported by our Deacons and the COTH Cares Team. Because of this added responsibility, we requested in our grant proposal to the Lilly Endowment that the intern's salary be covered as part of the grant. This specific request (for \$3,000.00, based on 2010 intern funding) was approved as a designated portion of the grant money.

Q. I'm confused about Dee's Sabbatical purpose and theme. Is she just going to *play* the whole time? How does that benefit Church of the Hills?

A. It has become a well documented fact that *play* is essential to the well being of humans. It is also observable in the animal kingdom. Not only is play integral to our well being, but it can cross species lines, allowing animals to help with the healing process in humans. The use of pets in visits to hospitals and nursing homes is one example; the use of equestrian activities with troubled or disabled youth is another. Much work has been done on this subject by The National Institute for Play (for further info about the institute, check out their website: <http://www.nifplay.org>).

Dee's fascination with just how vital play is to our physiological, psychological and spiritual well being began a couple of years ago at a CREDO retreat for clergy. Her sabbatical will be

a journey enabling her to explore this interest in greater depth, especially as play relates to our spiritual well being.

The following brief excerpts from Dee's Sabbatical proposal highlight specific ways in which she plans to pursue this quest. She plans to:

- *observe and participate with professionals who work with wounded or orphaned animals and reeducate them to play again*
- *observe and participate with these experts as they encourage the reengaged animals to help heal humans who have forgotten how to play because of trauma in their lives*
- *integrate these "hands on" experiences of play and its impact on our spiritual development*

Dee's sabbatical will benefit our congregation in several ways. While Dee is experiencing restoration and nourishment for her soul, we the congregation, can experience a type of sabbatical ourselves: a slowing down and perhaps learning to approach situations from a new perspective. Our visiting pastors will incorporate Dee's sabbatical theme into their sermon series. Other congregations have reported that sometimes new leaders have emerged from within the congregation and/or present leaders find new depths of leadership.

Q. How will COTH manage without Dee for a summer? What if I get sick, or a loved one passes away? How will Session function? What about weekly sermons?

A. Part of the benefit of a renewal sabbatical is renewal for the congregation. Each of Dee's functions will be competently covered by current staff, congregation members, and a hired intern specializing in pastoral care. Those planning a wedding in the summer will be told upon inquiry of Dee's time away, and she will meet with the marrying couple to help them identify another pastor to perform the service. Funerals will be overseen by the funeral coordinator, staff, deacons, and worship team and the family will select an officiating pastor with their assistance. A qualified Session moderator will be retained for the summer Session meetings. The sabbatical and worship teams are finalizing an exciting rotation of visiting pastors for each weekly sermon.

Q. Who will cover Dee's worship functions? Will we still have meaningful worship services?

A. A detailed strategy is in development for coverage of all Dee's functions. The worship and sabbatical teams are excited for a themed worship series to coincide with Dee's travels. We will explore "Godly Play" for two or three Sundays; while Dee is swimming with dolphins, we will explore "Descending Into Our Spiritual Depths"; and to commemorate Dee's climb of Mt. Kilimanjaro we will enjoy a sermon series entitled "Ascending the Mountain of God." Guest pastors are currently being interviewed and a full schedule will be released as soon as the pastors are committed.

Q. Did Kim Skilling take a Sabbatical? She was at Church of the Hills more than five years.

A. Kim was due a Sabbatical through her terms of call and the Personnel team at the time worked with her toward that end. Kim and her family opted for a pastoral exchange and spent several weeks in New Zealand during her sabbatical timeframe.