

2011

Ministry Sabbatical Grant Program




Wheat Ridge[™]
MINISTRIES
Be inspired—Make an impact

Rev. Tim Fangmeier
Sabbatical Coach and Staff Associate

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Programs

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Greetings in the Name of our Healing Christ!

I am excited to share this report on the five-year pilot of our Ministry Sabbatical Grant Program. It affirms the importance of rest and renewal on the health of the pastor and the congregation, and on the growth of new ministries.

Daily we are reminded about the challenges pastors face in preserving their health and wellness, while serving their congregations. This is particularly important as pastors and other church leaders today face a variety of unique challenges as they serve the needs of people in their congregation and community in the name of Christ.

Our belief that congregations can be centers of health and healing led us to support ministry sabbaticals as a way to bring renewal and new energy to pastors and their congregation. The sabbaticals provided time for them to reassess their mission and resources. As renewed partners, pastors and their congregation members were eager to develop new ministries responding to needs in their communities.

The Ministry Sabbatical Grant Program was funded by a handful of faithful donors for whom we are continually thankful.

We pray that this report inspires you develop periods of rest and renewal in your lives and to encourage a sabbatical experience for your pastor. With some planning, a sabbatical can be within reach for every congregation and can have a lasting impact on your ministry.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard E. Herman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "R".

Dr. Richard E. Herman
President

FOREWORD

For centuries, Jews and Christians alike have preached, taught, practiced and written about the significance of Sabbath! Sabbath observance shapes the worship life of Jewish and Christian communities. Sabbath observance has had a deep influence on cultural habits, morality and even the economy—so called “Blue Laws” and days on which commerce was to be avoided so there would be more time for worship and family.

While 21st Century American society seems to be shedding many of these cultural, moral and economic habits in favor of a 24/7 lifestyle, there seems to be renewed interest in recovering what lies at the heart of the Judeo-Christian understanding of Sabbath: **God has woven rest and renewal into the very fabric of creation and invites us to share in these Sabbath gifts!**

Wheat Ridge Ministries and their Ministry Sabbatical Grant Program have provided an opportunity for congregations and their pastors to experience the gift of Sabbath through pastoral sabbaticals. In the report that follows, we hear what a gift these grants and the grant program have been. We have the opportunity to listen to the words of pastors and congregational leaders as they testify to God’s present-day power of renewal. We hear about the concrete benefits of sabbaticals both to pastors and to the congregations they serve. We hear about the impact of sabbaticals on new ministry development.

Above all, we can observe the hand of God, at work in the lives of pastors and congregations, as they explore the Sabbath gifts of rest and renewal. These are the stories of people and congregations who are refreshed and restored—and vibrant, thriving ministries that grow in Sabbath time.

Rev. Richard J. Bruesehoff

Director for Lifelong Learning
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Co-Author
Clergy Renewal:
The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning (2000)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Developing and sustaining new congregational ministries requires a healthy relationship between a congregation and its pastor. New ministries thrive when there is mutual appreciation for each other's roles and responsibilities; commitment to a shared vision and mission; and openness to try new ideas and delegate to new leaders. Sabbaticals are vital periods of rest and reflection to preserve healthy, effective, and responsive long-term ministry.

Yet, there are still those who question the importance of sabbaticals and its relationship to the health of the congregation. Questions are raised regarding whether congregations benefit from an extended time off by the pastor.

We now have initial evidence that planned periods of rest and renewal bring new energy to congregational ministry. Based on surveys of ministry leaders and congregation leaders who participated in Wheat Ridge Ministries Sabbatical Grant program, we have found:

- A sabbatical renewed the ministry leader's mind, body and spirit returning him or her to their congregation energized and more committed to their ministry.
- The sabbatical experience refreshed the congregation and its lay leaders, through identifying and developing new lay leaders, renewed inspiration and energy for new ministries, and greater clarity regarding the mission and ministry of the congregation.
- The renewal experienced by the ministry leader and congregation led to new energy and commitment for pursuing new ministry development.

Consistent in all of our survey responses and final grant reports was **a deep appreciation and greater awareness of the need for unencumbered time.**

"Whether you like it or not, read and pray daily. It is for your life; there is no other way ... Do justice to your own soul; give it time and means to grow. Do not starve yourself any longer."

John Wesley, in a letter to a pastor in 1760

INTRODUCTION

Congregations are dynamic, relational, organizations; messy, complex and beautifully intricate in a way that only God could have designed. They are based in shared beliefs, vision and mission among the pastor, ministry leaders and members. As Dr. Robert Rosin of Concordia Seminary stated, "The relationship between pastor and congregation is vital to the life of the church."ⁱ When the relationship is healthy, the church's mission is effectively pursued and can impact significantly the needs of their local community.

A healthy relationship between pastors and their congregations is marked by mutual understanding and appreciation for their distinct roles. They see ministry as a partnership; pastoral leadership supported and affirmed by lay leaders actively engaged in the work. Inspired ideas are cultivated into new ministries; ministries that are pursued with an expansive sense of stewardship and trust in God's provision.

Healthy congregations can be centers of health and hope, absorbing and absolving the worst elements of human nature with the Gospel message of grace and mercy. Yet, recent surveys of clergy health and wellness share a picture that seems far from healthy.

- *The New York Times* reported, "Members of the clergy now suffer from obesity, hypertension and depression at rates higher than most Americans" and survey respondents indicated they would "change jobs if they could."ⁱⁱ
- In July 2010, Duke University's Clergy Health Initiative reported, "United Methodist Church ministers in North Carolina had higher-than-average rates of obesity, diabetes, blood pressure, asthma and arthritis. ... 82 percent of ministers still sometimes felt guilty they weren't doing enough in their role as clergy."ⁱⁱⁱ
- In a 2010 survey, the Texas District of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod reported, "Over one quarter of [their pastors] (27%) report high levels of 'fatigue and irritation' as part of their daily ministry experiences and 26% have 'often' or 'very often' felt 'worn out' in the last 30 days."^{iv}
- In a 2001 report, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America found "Seventeen percent said they suffered from depression, 20 percent were dissatisfied with their devotional lives and 68 percent were overweight."^v

One effective and relatively simple remedy recommended by both health care experts and religious leaders is intentional time off for the pastor and congregation to rest and regain perspective.

Within the congregational ministry arena, this time is called a *sabbatical*. The word *sabbatical* is drawn from *Sabbath*, meaning to "close or rest" and is connected with the last day of Creation when God rested from His work (Gen. 2:3). God modeled Sabbath rest for his people, stating "Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy" (Ex. 20:8-11). Regular periods of rest and reflection were a community experience. Believers were called to dedicate the seventh day

of the week for worship and rest. Farmers were to leave their fields uncultivated, to allow it rest, every seventh year. As Eugene Peterson noted, “Sabbatical years are the biblically based provision for restoration.”^{vi} Jesus affirmed the human need for rest by His frequent habit of withdrawing to a quiet place to meditate, pray, and be renewed for ministry.

Congregations and pastors today need to reclaim periods of rest and renewal as vital toward preserving healthy, effective, and dynamic long-term ministry. Even though respected authorities in the church have been encouraging sabbaticals for decades, questions are still raised regarding the effectiveness of sabbaticals: What are these benefits to the ministry leader? How does the congregation benefit from a sabbatical period, often negatively perceived as an extended “paid vacation”? Does a period of rest and renewal lead to growth of the ministry of the congregation?

In the following report, Wheat Ridge offers three conclusions regarding the benefits of sabbaticals on the pastor and congregation based on an analysis and assessment of our Ministry Sabbatical Grant Program.

- A sabbatical improved the ministry leader’s mind, body and spirit returning him or her to their congregation energized and more committed to their ministry.
- The sabbatical experience refreshed the congregation and its lay leaders, through identifying and developing new lay leaders, renewed inspiration and energy for new ministries, and greater clarity regarding the mission and ministry of the congregation.
- The renewal to the ministry leader and congregation experienced led to new energy and commitment for pursuing new ministry development.

In 2004, the **Ministry Sabbatical Grant Program** was launched as a five-year pilot program to promote ministry leader wellness through modest, congregation-matched grants. Any full-time ministry leader was eligible for a grant of up to \$7,500, which the congregation matched equally through budgeted funds or through other means, such as fundraisers. All applicants had complimentary access to a sabbatical coach, Rev. Tim Fangmeier. The program furthered Wheat Ridge Ministries’ mission to seed new human care ministries within congregations through renewing the ministry leader and congregation.

During the pilot, **Wheat Ridge Ministries awarded 48 grants** to 46 pastors, one Director of Christian Education and one Ministry of Music. Thirty-seven (37) of the recipients were from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and eleven (11) were with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. The total amount of funds awarded was \$256,000 with that same amount matched by congregations. The median amount awarded was approximately \$6,000 and recipients were from around the country. The program would not have been possible without funding provided by generous donors who care about the health and wellness of Lutheran ministry leaders.

In the summer of 2010, an online survey was conducted to assess the impact of the grant program. Two surveys were used; one to the ministry leader and another to the

congregation leader who facilitated the planning and implementation of the sabbatical. Thirty-eight (38) ministry leaders and 25 congregation leaders submitted responses. Several of the survey questions were modeled after a similar survey conducted by Sheldon W. Sorge of the Louisville Institute's.^{vii}

BENEFITS TO THE MINISTRY LEADER

The personal benefits of the sabbatical on the ministry leader were assessed with questions focused on areas of wellness in the Wholeness Wheel developed by the Inter-Lutheran Coordinating Committee on Ministerial Health and Wellness.^{viii} Ministry leaders were asked to compare their quality of life before and after the sabbatical in six of the seven areas. (The seventh area, financial, was not assessed.)

Spiritual

All of the respondents reported that they were spiritually renewed during the sabbatical, through their reading, travel, and time with others. **Eight-five percent (85%) planned to schedule regular time for spiritual renewal** after their sabbatical. Congregation leaders recognized this renewal, as one shared, “The congregation is feeling the positive effects of the pastor’s renewed spiritual commitment.”

Intellectual

All of the recipients planned intellectually-stimulating activities within their sabbaticals, including new cultural experiences and theological research and writing. Rev. Arthur Umbach noted that “concentrated time to develop a new skill or explore a field of interest” is vital for equipping healthy leaders “to help us meet the opportunities and challenges of this new missionary age.”^{ix} A majority of the recipients used funds to travel internationally, including Africa, the Holy Land, Lutheran sites in Germany, and England. Half of them reported developing a new skill or hobby. Other activities included focused reading and study programs.

Physical

As noted in the introduction, physical health is often used as a barometer for a person’s quality of life. **Improved physical health, like feeling rested and refreshed, was reported by 92%** of the respondents. Many recognized that they had neglected this area of wellness and **82% indicated a new intention to be at rest** and to find time for solitude. One noted, “I returned as a rested and refreshed leader and was more attentive to others’ needs and more eager to serve.”

Emotional

Pastors are drawn into the emotional events in the lives of their members – new births, celebrating personal milestones, battling with cancer or chronic illness, or deaths of loved ones. While providing pastoral care and counseling, often pastors are not effectively coping with their stress, which can have a cumulative impact on their health. The sabbatical period releases them from the daily needs of their members. After the

sabbatical, **97% indicated they are handling the stress and pressure of ministry in healthier ways**, through exercise, talking with trusted advisors, or getting spiritually strengthened. A congregation leader noted, “Our Pastor seems to be refreshed and this is evident in the day to day dealings with problems.”

Social/Relational

Ministry leaders noted two changes in their relationships with staff and congregation members. One was a greater appreciation for the role and work of the pastor: “I was missed by staff, leaders, and members. That increased the value and importance of the relationships. There was a broader understanding of my role.” The second was increased openness and transparency: “**My willingness to be transparent and to take greater risks without feeling guilty or fearful of failure...was led by God’s Spirit.**”

Their relationship with family members also changed. Over 75% of the ministry leaders reported an increase in quality time and 73% reported increased communication with their spouse after the sabbatical.

Vocational

A ministry leader’s commitment to his or her vocation can wane after several years of ministry, as they face routine and daily frustration. Of those that responded, **92% agreed or strongly agreed that the sabbatical renewed and deepened their ministry and 89% agreed or strongly agreed that their confidence in leading was strengthened.**

One congregation leader noted:

Pastor realized as part of his study he was practicing what he described as ‘functional atheism.’ When he returned he challenged himself as well as our congregation to find ways to address our lethargy as a congregation. The congregation has responded well to the challenge and is alive and active.

These results echo those reported by Sorge in the 2008 Louisville Institute Survey. He found that 87% of the pastors reported the sabbatical “significantly renewed their commitment to ministry” and 95% reported that their sabbatical “refreshed or re-energized” them to a great or moderate extent. He also reported that a majority of congregational leaders report that the sabbatical provided “significant benefit to their churches.”^x



Consistent in all of our survey responses and final grant reports was a **deep appreciation and greater awareness of the need for unencumbered time**. Time with God and the Word to reflect on ministry, calling, and life. Time to recreate a sacred space in the daily routine for spiritual renewal. Time to be renewed and encouraged from ministry that felt stagnant or declining. Time to spend freely with spouse and family. Time away from persistent pressure and routine of daily ministry. Time to assess one's physical and mental health and to establish or renew habits toward a healthier lifestyle.

BENEFITS TO THE CONGREGATION

Sabbatical resources focus primarily on the benefits the experience brings to the individual taking the sabbatical. Few describe how the sabbatical can benefit the congregation – members, staff, and leadership – when they also have an intentional plan. When both the leader and the congregation have rested and reflected on their roles, the health of the relationship is improved and can translate into more effective ministry.

An intentional congregation plan for rest and reflection is crucial to gain the full benefit of the sabbatical. Grant applicants were encouraged to work with a sabbatical committee and/or an advisor to develop a balanced personal and congregational plan.^{xi} Rev. Tim Fangmeier, our Sabbatical Coach, reinforced this with those he advised.

Congregation plans typically have two aspects. The first is a collective reflection or study experience in which all members can participate. Some congregations utilized an interim pastor who was uniquely trained to guide the congregation through an appraisal of their mission. Others used Bible studies led by lay persons that harmonized with the pastor's experiences.

"The congregation was reminded throughout this (sabbatical) time that they have gifts for ministry and that they have opportunities to use them."

Survey response from a ministry leader

A second part of a congregation's plan is outlining how the ministry leader's responsibilities will be covered. All of the participating congregations relied on lay leaders to take on some of the pastor's responsibilities, like hospital and in-home visits, planning the worship service, or leading Bible studies. Those that could not be delegated to lay persons were covered by an interim pastor or one or more resource pastors.

Three specific benefits to the congregation were noted from the sabbatical experience. First, personal relationships between the ministry leader, staff, lay leaders and members were strengthened. Second, there was a greater appreciation for the role and responsibilities of the pastor. Lastly, there was an increased involvement by lay leaders that continued after the sabbatical period.

Relationships with staff, congregation leaders, and members were strengthened.

Both surveys asked respondents to compare the quality of relationships between the pastor and staff, lay leaders and members, before and after the sabbatical. **Eighty-six percent (86%) of the ministry leaders reported their relationships with church staff, congregational leaders, and members were strengthened.**

[I] was feeling lethargic, anxious, depressed, on the verge of burnout before sabbatical, hard to drag myself to church and do my work. After sabbatical I find myself looking forward to being with members of the flock, interacting with them, having more sense of humor, more bounce in my step.

When asked about whether they connected authentically with church members, only 19% reported it was strong before the sabbatical. That percentage rose to 54% after the sabbatical. Of the congregation leaders who responded, **92% agreed that the pastor connected authentically with the congregation after the sabbatical**, compared to 74% before.

I came to realize that my leadership in modeling healthy relationships, first in my family, then with the Council, is essential to creating a healthy, relational church. I've seen the fruits of this leadership since my return.

The congregation had a renewed appreciation for the role of the ministry leader.

A ministry leader's role and responsibilities can grow incrementally, often in ways unnoticed until the leader becomes overwhelmed. Pastors hesitate to step back and rebalance due to perceived expectations and to the fear of vulnerably admitting they cannot do it all. **As the congregation plans for the absence of the ministry leader, members gain a greater awareness for the scope of a leader's role and responsibilities.** Finding individuals to fill these tasks reinforces the unique skills and abilities the ministry leader provides to the church. While no specific question surveyed the respondents on this point, this appreciation was noted by many in their general comments:

I think the leadership realized how much work a solo pastor does, how many responsibilities they have. I think they realized the importance of empowering themselves and other lay people to do the work of ministry ... I think they realized they have had more gifts than they thought they did ... I think they recognized the importance of my leadership.

People are aware of the need to share the responsibility of ministry beyond myself as the head pastor.

Lay leadership increased during the sabbatical and continued after the sabbatical.

In describing his sabbatical, Eugene Peterson stated, "One of the dangers of a long-term pastorate is the development of neurotic dependencies between the pastor and people."^{xii} A sabbatical forces separation that otherwise might only occur if the pastor

went to another congregation. This separation increased the congregation's confidence in non-pastoral leadership, which broadened the resources available for ministry after the pastor returned. **Sixty-two percent (62%) of the congregation leaders reported that the confidence in the non-pastoral leadership of the church was "strong" after the sabbatical, up from 46% before the sabbatical.** Ministry leaders shared a similar increase from 19% before to 44% after.

Our congregation is less dependent on our Pastor and looks more to the Church Council for leadership.

There is more openness to new ideas and letting lay persons lead the process.

My confidence in the congregation's leadership and service abilities was strengthened by me being away for almost three months.

IMPACT ON NEW MINISTRY DEVELOPMENT

A healthy relationship between a ministry leader and congregation is fertile ground where inspired ideas can grow into new, effective ministry. The survey results found that new ministry growth was due not only to the return of a renewed ministry leader, *but also* to a renewed congregation that rediscovered the potential of its lay leadership and reclaimed their gifts for ministry. Health brought through a sabbatical strengthens the relationship and increases capacity for new ministry.

A renewed and committed ministry leader

Ministry leaders rated aspects of their ministry before and after the sabbatical. **Those reporting a strong commitment to their congregation's ministry nearly doubled after the sabbatical, from 38% to 70%.** Interest in new ministry increased with **54% reporting a strong interest in new ministry after sabbatical up from only 8% before.** If we added those that responded as having a somewhat strong interest, the percentage jumped from 48% before sabbatical to 100% after.

The congregation seems to be more open to new ideas and creative types of ministry. They truly see the difference in me, and many have commented on my renewed energy. I believe the congregation is catching that energy, and using it in significant new ministries.

There has been an overall increase in enthusiasm in worship. This, I believe has a direct correlation to the pastor's renewed enthusiastic leadership of worship. A discipleship program was initiated by our pastor.

A renewed and committed congregation

Responses from congregational leaders found that the sabbatical led to the identification and development of new lay leaders, renewed inspiration and energy for new ministries, and greater clarity regarding the mission and ministry of the congregation. These results are important for expanding capacity for new ministry.

As discussed above, the sabbatical increased the congregation's awareness of the ministry leader's responsibilities and the involvement of lay leaders, leading to greater confidence in lay leaders. Confidence in the congregation's leaders grew from 46% prior to sabbatical to 63% afterward.

The leadership of the congregation remains strong and even displays confidence...new energy is erupting and there is new hope that we will continue to be able to spread God's great news for years to come.

Numerous members are more pro-active. They have chosen to take responsibility for starting or accomplishing something on their own, not waiting to be asked. Numerous tasks and programs have been accomplished without my input...and done very well.

"The sabbatical has increased confidence in future ministry in our community. I would say that the Lord has responded to the sabbatical favorably, placing in our path new opportunities, which we have courageously pursued."

Survey response from a ministry leader

Respondents also reported an increase in energy and interest in new ministry ideas. **Ninety-two percent (92%) of the leaders reported a "strong or somewhat strong" interest in starting new ministries after the sabbatical experience**, compared to only 52% before.

The congregational leadership's commitment to ministry has been strong before and after. However, this commitment has energized more members around a variety of new ministries.

The congregation has become more innovative and engaged in the general well being of the members. New programs and committees have initiated work toward these efforts.

The visiting pastor brought some new and interesting ideas to our church and our pastor was willing to incorporate them.

The intentional time to reflect on the congregation's mission and the increased appreciation for the ministry leader led to a renewed focus and commitment. This change was noted by both congregation leaders and the ministry leader.

It seems the congregation is more united in purpose, particularly in working together to bring our church and school finances out of debt.

The congregation is more focused and willing to let nonessential activities go.

CONCLUSION

In the book, *The Contemplative Pastor*, Eugene Peterson explained to his congregation before taking his sabbatical, "One of the things I fear most as your pastor is that out of fatigue or sloth I end up going through the motions, substituting professional smoothness for personal grappling with the life of the Spirit in our life together."^{xiii} Our grappling with the life of the Spirit personally, collectively as a congregation and within our broader community takes wellness in body, mind, and spirit. We miss a key means of maintaining wellness when we do not allow time to be renewed through rest. Demonstrating the importance of sabbatical by providing them to ministry leaders reconnects us to Christ, the source for energy to accomplish His ministry in the church, to the community and world.

ⁱ Dr. Robert Rosin, "A Vital Relationship" *The Lutheran Witness*, June 2002, 10.

ⁱⁱ Paul Vitellow, "Taking a Break From the Lord's Work" *The New York Times*, August 2, 2010.

ⁱⁱⁱ David Olson, "Clergy sometimes neglect their own needs while helping others" *The Press-Enterprise*, September 26, 2010. Accessed on April 12, 2011 at

http://www.pe.com/localnews/stories/PE_News_Local_D_clergystress27.2b7d011.html.

^{iv} Commission on Ministerial Growth and Support, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, "Pastoral Health Assessment" Texas District, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, October 2010, 8. Accessed April 12, 2011 at

http://txdistlcms.org/downloads/Pastoral_Health_Assessment_Texas_2010.pdf.

^v Olson, *The Press-Enterprise*.

^{vi} Eugene Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993) 145.

^{vii} Sheldon W. Sorge, "What Difference does a Pastoral Sabbatical Make?: What Pastors and their Congregations have to Say", Resources for American Christianity, accessed February 9, 2011 at <http://www.resourcingchristianity.org>.

^{viii} "Wholeness Wheel," Wheat Ridge Ministries at <http://www.wheatridge.org/resources/health-ministry-center/wholeness-wheel/>.

^{ix} Rev. Arthur Umbach, "My Sabbatical Renewal" Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, accessed February 9, 2011 at <http://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=538>. Rev. Umbach is the Regional Facilitator and Director of Spiritual Life, Southeastern District, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

^x Sorge, "What Difference."

^{xi} A great planning resource for clergy and congregations is A. Richard Bullock and Richard J. Bruesehoff, *Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning* (Alban 2000).

^{xii} Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*, 150.

^{xiii} Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*, 145.

APPENDIX A - OBSTACLES IN SABBATICAL PLANNING

Survey responses also drew attention to obstacles that the ministry leader faced in securing congregation support for a sabbatical. Our grant recipients were taking a sabbatical for the first time in congregations that had not previously experienced a sabbatical. We share these common obstacles to aid other first-time planners.¹

Resistance to the concept of a sabbatical

Comments from some respondents noted a resistance to the concept of a ministry sabbatical, particularly from members who do not have an opportunity for a sabbatical in their own vocations. The pastor may resist a sabbatical, feeling that he or she is too busy to be away from ministry for three months, much less find time to plan for the absence. Financing the sabbatical experience is also frequently expressed by those opposing the perceived “extended vacation.” Educating the congregation (and sometimes the pastor) about the necessity of sabbaticals for the health of ministry can be the most difficult aspect of the preparation.

Poor timing or planning for the congregation

There is no perfect time to take a sabbatical. Problems will arise that appear to require the pastor’s expertise to solve. A good plan should include guidelines and process for when a pastor can be contacted about church business. Planning should avoid scheduling the sabbatical shortly before or after major changes occur (for example, in the middle of a building project), if there is significant contact in the congregation, or new staff members are hired. Here are two examples:

- A new staff member was added shortly before the pastor left on sabbatical and had not been fully assimilated within the staff. The pastor reported that the lack of consistent leadership and oversight for the new staff member caused him to come back to “staff problems.”
- One congregation hired a consultant and created a task force to assess communication and the vision of the congregation. This process created “conflict and tension during the pastor’s sabbatical” and made the pastor’s reentry period more difficult. Resolving the problem took energy away from re-engaging positively with the congregation.

Fear of losing the pastor

Members may fear that a sabbatical is a prelude to the pastor leaving the congregation, according to some anecdotal information. However, our survey results did not affirm this concern. Of the ministry leaders, 86% were in the same ministry position. Most of the remaining leaders moved to a new position over two years after the sabbatical. These results may reflect our careful grant review

process that screens out through coaching consultations requests that appear to see the sabbatical as a means of escape from an unhealthy situation.

Negative perceptions about sabbaticals seem rooted in poor understanding of their importance for healthy ministry and vocation. One way to increase acceptance is for church leaders at the national, district, and synodical levels to lead by example. When Wheat Ridge began the Sabbatical Resource Center, we made an effort to talk by phone to ELCA Synod and LCMS District leaders. They were supportive and encouraging, yet we were surprised by the few leaders who had experienced a sabbatical.

ⁱ Mark Miller-McLemore, "The dark side of sabbatical," Faith and Leadership, accessed on February 9, 2011 at <http://www.faithandleadership.com/content/the-dark-side-sabbatical>.

Appendix B - Elements within the Ministry Sabbatical Grant Program

In addition to our goals for renewal for ministry leaders and congregations, we wanted to assess the unique elements within the Ministry Sabbatical Grant Program, which, we believe, lead to a greater and deeper impact on the sabbatical experience

Size of the Ministry Sabbatical Grants and the matching funds requirement

When we developed the Grant Program, we wanted to demonstrate that sabbaticals were within the funding capabilities of congregations, to stimulate first time sabbaticals and motivate congregations to create a sustained policy. We perceived this was a unique purpose, different from other sabbatical granting organizations. We made an educated decision regarding the funding necessary for a successful sabbatical, funded in partnership with the congregation. By requiring a match, we would be able to leverage our funds and increase their sense of ownership in the sabbatical experience.

We estimated that \$15,000 would be a sufficient amount to fund a quality sabbatical experience. Congregations could request up to \$7,500 and were required to provide a dollar-for-dollar match. Over the five year period, the average grant request was \$5,333, with the median falling at \$6,000. With the matching funds, congregations used between \$10,500 - \$12,000 to fund the sabbatical period (this does not include funds used to pay for the ministry leader's salary and benefits). **Seventy-eight percent (78%) of recipients said the size of the grant was sufficient** for the sabbatical experience.

The funding adequately provided for vacancy pastoral care and permitted me to travel and learn through meeting people and enjoying life.

The cost of the experience left after the funding and congregational offering (and family gifts) was easy for me to handle.

While I would have been able to take a sabbatical without the grant, the grant made it much, much easier.

Without the grant I would have been in debt after the travels and because of the grant I was not.

It was enough to make some grumpy people less so. But not enough to do something big... My sabbatical had to be local and humble in goal.

Nearly two-thirds of the ministry leaders reported they would not have been able to take a sabbatical without the grant funds. To us, this means that the program achieved the desired outcome of stimulating first-time sabbaticals by ministry leaders. It also demonstrates to us the need for continued funding for this critical experience.

I could not have done my sabbatical without the grant, but in hindsight, it was barely enough to make the trip possible.

I was grateful for the WRM funding but also for the discipline in articulating my goals and planning as part of the grant writing. Thanks you again for your fantastic ministry of support.

We also received strong support for the matching funds requirement of the grant award. **Three-fourths of the respondents reported that the matching funds increased the congregation's commitment to the sabbatical experience.** It helped to underline our concept of a ministry sabbatical as a shared experience between the ministry leader and the congregation. The funds could be matched through a variety of ways – fundraisers, budgeted funds, individual gifts, etc.

The amount was very beneficial in funding the sabbatical while keeping the congregation responsible for its share and ownership.

The fact that the grant was a matching gift encouraged not only congregational donations but actually congregational support.

I kept expenses low for this first sabbatical. The match funding from the congregation basically came from one individual...This was a wonderful blessing but the congregation had less buy in.

Your grant, plus the matching amount the congregation made available, funded the sabbatical completely. The idea of having the congregation match the grant is very good, because it gives the congregation a sense of ownership and responsibility for the sabbatical, in addition to the appreciation of the grant itself.

Sabbatical policy implementation

A sabbatical policy is a key step in recognizing a sabbatical as more than an once-in-a-lifetime experience for the ministry leader and the congregation. It can also promote sabbatical-taking by other ministry leaders, including Directors of Christian Education, principals, and teachers. One respondent said, "Our DCE will be taking a sabbatical next year, as a result of the new policy." The ministry leader survey results showed that only 28% of the congregations had policies in place before receiving our funding. **After the grant program, 82% of the congregations reported having policies in place.**

Complimentary sabbatical coach

We recognized that developing a plan for the sabbatical period and working through the implementation of a policy can be very daunting for pastors and congregations for the first time. We built into the program access to Rev. Tim Fangmeier, a complimentary coach to guide interested pastors and congregation leaders through the planning process whether they were applying for a grant or not. During the pilot program, coaching was not a requirement for the grant, but it was strongly encouraged.

Overall, **50% of the respondents said they contacted the coach** in preparing for their sabbatical **and were profuse in their appreciation** for this service.

It was wonderful to have a coach to help me with some great ideas and insight. I really appreciated this gift. Please be sure to offer this gift to all your recipients!

Couldn't have done it without his guidance... A great plus to help me lead my Planning Team...

Absolutely essential to my preparation and openness to ways the Lord would speak to my heart and quench my thirst for release and healing.

He was very helpful in making me realize I was planning too much and not taking time to rest and renew.

Online Ministry Sabbatical Resource Center

One final tool that we provided to individuals wanting more information about sabbaticals and sabbatical planning was our online Ministry Sabbatical Resource Center. The Resource Center contained helpful tips on how to plan a sabbatical, write a sabbatical policy, and funding opportunities, including our grant program. The Resource Center echoes our belief in sabbaticals as a shared experience between the pastor and the congregation critical to new ministry development within the congregation for service in the community.

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