

SABBATH KEEPING and SABBATICAL TAKING

Sunday—Remember the sabbath to keep it holy—The first day of the week—Sabbath rest—Sabbatical time. This collection of resources and reflections is meant to stimulate conversation about the meaning of renewal and rest, of sabbath keeping and sabbatical taking. It is an invitation to pastors and lay leaders to consider WITH their parishes the need for rest and renewal as a congregation. It's an opportunity to engage communities of faith in intentional observation of sabbath time. It's also an opportunity to think about pastoral sabbatical time, modeling the importance of renewal and the meaning of sabbath keeping, sabbatical taking.

I have combined the two topics intentionally. Sabbath rest and renewal are as crucial and critical for our congregations as sabbatical rest and replenishment are for clergy. Helping one another think about sabbath rest and our common need for renewal (Sunday is “resurrection day” after all!) is a challenge worthy of our best efforts. One congregation in a neighboring synod chose to celebrate a “Year of Sabbath.” It became a congregational opportunity to change the rhythms of parish life, to slow down, and to invite intentional renewal and reflection. And it was combined with a pastoral sabbatical involving the entire parish. What better way to embody the meaning of sabbath rest!

In his book, *Sabbath: Restoring the Sacred Rhythm of Rest*, Wayne Muller writes, “The Sabbath rocks us and holds us until we remember who we are.” In our culture where time has become a commodity and remembering who we are is sometimes a challenge, sabbath keeping may be more important than ever. What follows here can be a catalyst for inviting the church to slow down, to remember and reclaim sabbath time. Additionally, it's an invitation to pastoral renewal and replenishment in the form of sabbatical leave. I hope you find it helpful!

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To observe the Sabbath is to bear witness to the Creator.

—Mekilta, to Exodus 20:13, excerpted from “The Living Pulpit”

BOOKS

... Recovery of the Sabbath is the most crucial and most demanding covenant command (spiritual discipline) now to be faced in the technological society. —Walter Brueggemann

We have no more wine

The jars of our lives have been emptied.
The fire in our eyes has gone out..
Our hope has been exhausted.
Who will give us new wine, new sight,
a new incentive?

For an invaluable introduction to the meaning of sabbath time and the importance of sabbatical taking, begin with Dorothy Bass's profound little book, *Receiving the Day: Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time*, Jossey-Bass, 2000. (B2398)

In Gail Ramshaw's artistic and poetic confession, *Under the Tree of Life*, she writes a chapter called "Each Sunday Morning." It is provocative and challenging. (B2304)

Wayne Muller's *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives* challenges our sense of what it means to be busy and productive. (B2485)

Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting by Marva Dawn is a straight-forward invitation to Christians to experience the "wholeness and joy that come from observing God's order for life" by observing sabbath time. (B1749)



First, Sunday cannot be the day of rest for pastors . . . Second, it is not easy to take a Sabbath. You've got to decide to do it . . . Third, a regular Sabbath puts a brake on overwork . . . Fourth, in order to practice Sabbath, you must learn one powerful word, No. That little word creates the hearth in which the fires of our calling can burn brightly.

—Gregory s. Cootsona, Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York City

The Alban Institute's *Clergy Renewal: the Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning* by A Richard Bullock and Richard J. Brueshoff provides guidance and practical suggestions for sabbatical planning. (B2459)

Henri Nouwen's life embodied the heart of Christianity. In *Sabbatical Journey*, he offers profound wisdom and insight from his own sabbatical taken the year before he died. (B2434)

The Sabbath rocks us and holds us until we remember who we are. —Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Restoring the Sacred Rhythm of Rest*

Abraham Joshua Heschel's classic, *The Sabbath*, continues to shape our notion of time as sacred, sabbath time as holy. Among Heschel's many contributions is his characterization of Judaism as a religion of time, not space, calling the sabbaths "our great cathedrals."

Another key resource for considering time as gift and sabbath rest as central is *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People* edited by Dorothy Bass. Bass (her chapter is titled "Keeping Sabbath") together with other authors explores twelve practices that can become an integral part of how we live as the body of Christ. (B2220)



Tilden Edwards explores the roots of Sabbath and the relationship between contemplation and ministry in his classic, *Sabbath Time*. (B2824)

More than Israel kept the Sabbath,
the Sabbath has kept Israel.
—Ahad HaAm, HaShiloah (1898)

Wendell Berry's *A Timbered Choir: the Sabbath Poems* is a beautiful collection of poetry written by Berry during Sunday morning walks.

Six days of work are spent . . . to make a Sunday quiet . . . that Sabbath may return. (B2689)

Pastor Larry Wohlrabe, formerly synod staff in the Southwest Minnesota Synod, graciously has provided us a copy of his D.Min. thesis: a collection of practical information and reflection on the meaning of ministerial sabbaticals. It includes basic guidelines for sabbatical leave including extended study and renewal, field research findings, interviews, and surveys. The title is *Ministerial Sabbaticals: Tools for Mission*. (B2822)

Catch Your Breath: God's Invitation to Sabbath Rest by Don Postema is a guide for small groups who wish to learn and practice sabbath rest. Six chapters help readers think more deeply about the meanings of spiritual rest. This resource is ideal for congregational discussion. (B2823)

The two songs that resonate in the Sabbath commandment call Sabbath keepers into a dance that embodies fundamental affirmations about God's relationship to humanity.

—Dorothy Bass, *Receiving the Day*

A thoughtful look at sabbath time and sabbatical taking can also be found in Melissa Bane Sevier's, *Journeying Toward Renewal: A Spiritual Companion for Pastoral Sabbaticals* from the Alban Institute. (B2825)

ARTICLES

Our Open Files contain several helpful articles about sabbath keeping, sabbatical taking. These include:

- Creating a Sabbatical Plan by John R. Gugel
- Sabbath: An Enormous Gift for the Congregation by Marva J. Dawn
- A Time to Rest: Sabbath Keeping for Leaders by Donna Schaper
- Sabbatical Lessons by Steven L. McKinley

The Liturgical Conference's *Liturgy: the Lord's Day* is a beautiful collection of essays and articles about sabbath time. Meaningful reflections include:

- Sunday as a Baptismal Day
- Holy Leisure and the Sabbath Tradition
- Sunday Liturgy in Jerusalem
- The Assembly: A Priestly People
- Sunday, Yesterday and Today (PR464)

“Living Pulpit’s” issue called *Sabbath* includes articles, quotations, books, and ideas for preaching.

This collection is another important resource for congregations in their study of sabbath time. Sample titles include:

- Jurgen Moltmann’s “Sabbath: Finishing and Beginning”
- Walter Burghardt’s “Sabbath and Sunday Belong Together”
- Dorothy Bass’s “The Practice of Keeping Sabbath: A Gift for Our Time”
- Martin Marty’s “Sabbath: Our Need for Meaning”
- Judith Hoch Wray’s “Jesus, the Sabbath and Rest”



Sabbath is . . . an attitude of the heart which recognizes the need for regular soul care within the rhythm of daily life. —David Steffenson, First Lutheran Church, Little Falls, Minnesota

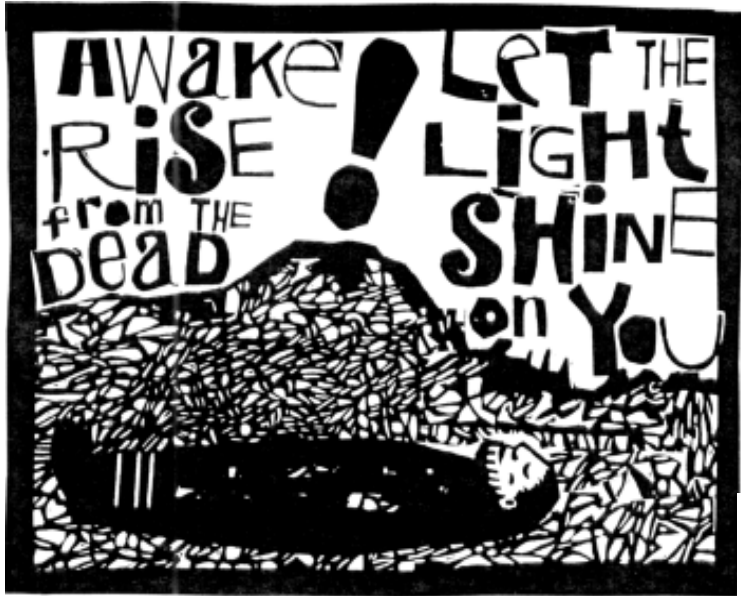
SABBATICAL POLICIES / GUIDES

The Resource Center maintains a collection of sabbatical policies gathered from parishes across the church. These include financial aid guidelines, synod policies, resolutions, reflections.

The ELCA’s Division for Ministry supports the Wittenberg Center’s Sabbatical and Journey Planner. Go to www.elca.org/wittenberg/sabbatical/links.html for information about sabbatical plans, guidelines and leadership support, spiritual retreats and monastic communities, research centers, and more. Links include ELCAWittenbergCenter@t-online.de The Division for Ministry posts guidelines shared by synods at www.elca.org/dm/leadership/sabbatical.html

An online pamphlet from the Disciples of Christ, **Sabbatical Leave for Pastors in the Christian Church: Suggested Guidelines** may also be helpful. Go to www.homeland.org/LEADERS/PastoralGuidelines/sabbatical.htm

Pastor David Steffenson and First Lutheran Church in Little Falls, Minnesota, have shared a series of articles and reports that describe their year-long focus on sabbath keeping. Central to the Year of



Sabbath was Pastor Steffenson's sabbatical. The congregation received a Lilly Endowment grant for the year and the reports for Lilly are also included in our collection. Pastor Steffenson's experience of sabbatical within the context of a parish commitment to rest and renewal as a way of observing sabbath time are important resources for other congregations. Questions and/or requests for additional information can be sent to firstserv@littlefalls.net

We also make available a Study of Sabbatical Policies of ELCA Synods by Lawrence Wohlrabe. A brief guide that includes policies from other synods is also part of our collection.

SABBATICAL PROGRAMS

"No," Anne Lamott once instructed the graduating class of San Francisco Theological Seminary, "is a complete sentence." She explained, "Believe me, we do not need hassled, bitter ministers. We don't want you to talk the talk, about this being the day the Lord hath made and we should rejoice and savor its beauty and poignancy when secretly you're tearing around like a white rabbit; we need you to walk the walk. And we need you to walk a little more slowly." —Anne Lamott in *Perspectives*, February 2002, excerpted from "Context"

The Charis Ecumenical Center maintains a resource for sabbatical planning. This includes sources of information, grant sources, programs and informal arrangements, and sabbatical retreat options. Go to www.cord.edu/dept/charis

The Lilly Endowment provides a resource called **National Clergy Renewal Program**. It makes available financial support for rest and renewal for pastors of Christian congregations. Go to clergyrenewal@yahoo.com or call 317-916-7302.

Through its **Sabbatical Grant for Pastoral Leaders** program, the Louisville Institute awards grants to pastoral leaders for extended leave for study, prayer, reflection, and renewal. For an application packet, go to www.louisville-institute.org This is open to full-time Christian leaders across the United States and Canada.

... the move from Sabbath as a 'good idea' to the practicalities of sabbatical is no simple or obvious [move.] –Walter Brueggemann

VIDEOS

The significance of sabbath time for Christianity, Judaism, and Islam is highlighted in **Sabbath of Peace**, a reflection about the ways sabbath time is observed among these three monotheistic religions. (VT1642)

Walter Wangerin's **The Ten Commandments** includes a segment on sabbath inviting listeners to discuss the meaning of the commandment using a series of questions. (VT2238)

There are many catechetical resources that include segments on what it means to observe sabbath time. Among them: **Dusting Off Theology**, **Living the Ten Commandments**, and **Power Tools: the Ten Commandments**. (VT930), (VT2040), (VT1379)



Sabbath is the gift of rest, reflection and renewal—a time of preparation at the beginning of the week, not a restoration from exhaustion at the end of a long busy week.

–David Steffenson, First Lutheran Church, Little Falls, Minnesota

A video and study guide called **Changing the Rhythm of Parish Ministry: Sabbatical Policy Insights** can be a helpful tool for introducing the idea of sabbatical time. It was developed by an ELCA congregation in Wisconsin as a tool for congregation councils, adult study groups, and church committees. (VT2183)

Roy Oswald's video and study guide **Why You Should Give Your Pastor a Sabbatical** makes the case for clergy sabbaticals as a way of retaining congregational vitality. It provides a general overview of sabbaticals and recommendations for a sabbatical rhythm. It also addresses and elaborates six points supporting sabbatical leave as renewal. (VT2445)

From a series on the Ten Commandments, **Keep the Sabbath** focuses on why the seventh day is special and what is meant by keeping it holy and set apart. (VT2160)

God is the generous creator who sanctifies time and the liberator who requires human beings to deal mercifully with one another. –Dorothy Bass